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ANNE SEVERIN.

ANNE SEVERIN.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "LE RÉCIT D'UNE SŒUR."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET,

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ANNE SEVERIN.

CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS the beginning of this century, about thirty years before the events which form the principal subject of this story took place, a number of men were one evening assembled in a room, dimly lighted by a lamp hanging from the ceiling, and with no other furniture than a table covered with papers. This meeting presented a strange medley of persons of high and low rank, rich and poor, noblemen and peasants. It included, also, some of those suspicious-looking individuals who are more or less

associated with any cause, be it good or bad, which is compelled to shun the light. There was only one person present who kept his hat on; and he seemed to be treated by the rest with deference, merely indicated in some instances by that shade of manner perceptible, though hardly to be defined, in a real grand seigneur's way of addressing a prince, even when on a footing of familiar intimacy with one towards whom others are apt to run into the extremes of freedom or obsequiousness. It was not, however, towards this personage that the eyes of the assembly were chiefly directed; but rather to a tall, striking-looking man, at that moment half concealed by the curtain of a window, into the recess of which he had withdrawn to read a letter.

A few minutes had elapsed since the

door had been opened. The last comers were gathered round the chimney, where a coal fire was blazing; for it was in London this meeting was held, and though the season was not further advanced than the end of August, the evening was cold and rainy. The rest of the party were divided into groups. Their voices sometimes rose above a whisper, but were soon lowered again at a sign from some one or other of those present. Then for a while nothing was heard but the confused hum of conversation carried on *sotto voce*, and accompanied by frequent glances towards the window.

At about half-past ten o'clock, the door, which had remained shut for about a quarter of an hour, gently opened, and almost unobserved, a young man slipped in, and going to the chimney,

shook the raindrops off his hat, and bent for a moment over the fire. The light of the flame shone on his features, which were so delicately chiselled that they would have been almost feminine in their beauty, if a fair moustachio and the peculiar expression of his large blue eyes had not given to his singularly attractive countenance an unmistakably manly character. The new comer warmed himself for a few seconds, and then looked up. His glance met that of a man of about forty years of age, who was standing near him. There was something noble and dignified in the appearance of this person, but the expression of his face darkened, and a malevolent gleam, almost amounting to a scowl, flashed across it when the young man, who did not seem to notice it, offered to shake hands with him.

“It is late,” the youth said, in a low voice ; “near eleven o’clock, I think.”

“Yes, so late, that I did not expect to see you here at all ; and really there would have been nothing surprising in your staying away—Monsieur Guillaume des Aubrys has something better to do than to come so far from the land of the living. He is not often occupied at this hour in running about the streets !”

“But yet you were aware, Monsieur le Marquis, that I had been summoned. What sort of person do you take me to be ?”

“Do not put yourself into a passion. I did not mean to offend you. I can assure you, that at your age, and circumstanced as you are, I should have found it difficult to make up my mind to come here to-night.”

“Circumstanced as I am ! Have

you then forgotten that there is nobody in the world who has more reason to be here to-night than I have? Yes, you must have forgotten," he added, after a pause, "that Raoul des Aubrys was my brother." As he uttered these words his face assumed an expression that contrasted strangely with the natural sweetness of his features.

"Excuse me, Des Aubrys," the other answered, with a softened manner; "upon my word, my thoughts were running in another direction, and I did not mean anything offensive to you."

At that moment the conversation was interrupted by the sound of a loud clear voice, and a general silence instantly ensued. The eyes of everyone present were turned on the speaker, who had resumed his place at the table. The lamp above his head was throwing its

full light on the face of a man of about thirty-five years of age, whose reddish hair, tinged here and there with grey, fell down almost as low as his shoulders, leaving unshaded his coarse sunburnt features, the vulgarity of which was only redeemed by the extraordinary expression of his eyes, which seemed endowed with the power of subduing the most audacious and encouraging the most timid. Whilst only seeking to unfold and clearly explain the scheme he was inviting his hearers to take part in, this man's spontaneous and unconscious eloquence carried them along with him, made them share all his emotions, and raised their enthusiasm to a pitch which proved to him that he had succeeded in his object, and that further explanations were unnecessary. Stopping short in his discourse, he abruptly exclaimed, "I have said

enough, gentlemen ! We have done now with words, and must proceed to deeds. Let those who choose to follow me lift up their hands."

Without exception, every hand was raised, and a burst of applause broke forth, which, however, the orator quickly repressed by a motion of his hand.

"By the appeal I made just now," he said, "I only meant to ascertain that you are all willing to devote yourselves to this enterprise, and that I may choose amongst you those whom I wish to follow me. Here are their names." He glanced over a list he was holding in his hand, took up a pen, and looked about him for a seat. Guillaume des Aubrys, who had not for a moment taken his eyes off his face whilst he was speaking, rushed out of the room and came back in a minute with a wooden stool. The conspirator

paused an instant to look at the person who had done him this little act of kindness, and said, "Who are you, my boy? and what has brought you here?"

"I am Guillaume des Aubrys, and I have come here to follow you."

"Des Aubrys!" exclaimed the Ven-dean chief; and a sorrowful and almost tender expression stole over his weather-beaten face as he drew the young man aside, and said to him, "Raoul des Aubrys was the name of the dearest and bravest of my companions."

"He was my brother. It was by your side, if I mistake not, that he was cruelly butchered."

A silent inclination of the head, and a look in which, amidst a softer sorrow, gleamed a fierce desire for revenge, were the only answers to this question. Then, with a sigh, he said, "That brave fellow

gave me some sad tokens to transmit to his mother.”

Guillaume drew from his bosom a large silver locket, which he opened. On one side of it was a lock of thick fair hair, resembling his own, and on the other a piece of linen in the shape of a heart and stained with blood. “That is Raoul’s hair,” he said, “and that heart was on his breast when he was murdered. It was only when she received these tokens, after days of cruel suspense, that my mother knew he was dead. She died of that grief, and I have to avenge them both by fighting against those who caused their deaths. So you see that, of course, I accompany you. If there are any that remain behind, I cannot be one of them.”

“But out of all who are here, I can only take twenty with me.”

“I *must* be one of those twenty.”

“Not this time, Guillaume. There will be other opportunities—other expeditions. This one is too rash, too desperate, too much of a forlorn hope, for one so young as you are. It is not boys of twenty we want.”

“No,” Guillaume replied, “it is this time I must go. Who knows? another time I might not have courage to answer your appeal. No, no, take me with you now. I cannot be happy unless I go and come back; and I am in a hurry to come back.”

“But you will *not* come back, my boy.”

These words, uttered with a terrible earnestness, thrilled through Guillaume’s heart. A cloud gathered over his eyes. For an instant he seemed to hesitate and struggle with himself; but soon, in a firm

though agitated voice, he said, "Never mind; God's will be done. Go I must."

The business, which had been for a moment interrupted by this colloquy, was then resumed. A little further discussion took place, and was followed by another silence. Then a list of those who were to go was read aloud. A few obscure names, and some of the most illustrious amongst the French nobility were included in the number. The last on the roll was that of Guillaume des Aubrys. A general exclamation—almost a murmur—rose in the assembly. His youth and good looks inspired a general feeling of interest; and, with one single exception, every person present felt grieved and shocked at the idea of his joining so perilous an enterprise.

He was surrounded and beset with

remonstrances and entreaties, but he made no reply to these friendly exhortations. Other thoughts were in his mind, and bending towards the leader, who was still seated at the table, carefully tearing up the list he had drawn up, he said to him in a low voice, "When must we be ready?"

"We start at once," was the reply.

"What, now, and from here? without time to say good-bye to any one, or make any preparations?"

"You cannot take anything with you. Money and arms, which are all we want, we shall find elsewhere. It is almost midnight now, and long before two o'clock we must be off. Do you hesitate? It is still time to change your mind!"

The moment for action was arrived; and no trace remained of the softer feel-

ings evinced a moment before. There was something imperious, and almost rough, in the manner with which these words were said. Guillaume shook his head, and though his features for a moment contracted with an expression of intense suffering, he did not betray any weakness. Kneeling down before the table, he hastily wrote a few words, and taking off the locket he wore round his neck, he wrapped it up in paper with the short letter he had just written, and sealed the parcel. After thinking for an instant, he glanced round the room, and soon caught sight of the person he was looking for. He went straight up to him.

“Monsieur le Marquis,” he said, “will you allow me to speak with you for a moment in private?”

The Marquis, taken by surprise, ap-

peared almost to hesitate; but quickly recovering himself, he answered in a frank and cordial manner, "By all means, Des Aubrys; I am quite at your service. But where can we go not to be overheard?"

"Come with me," Guillaume said; and opening the door, he led the way down a flight of stairs to a room on the floor below. He entered without knocking, and whispered to the Marquis, "It is La Mothe who lives here; but he is very busy upstairs, and there is no fear of his interrupting us just now."

The room was a small one, and in a state of great confusion. The uncertain light thrown by a lamp in the street enabled the two persons who had come into it to keep clear of the furniture, but not to see distinctly each other's face.

"It does not signify," Guillaume

said, "we have not time to get a candle, and, indeed, there is no occasion for it." He paused, as if to take breath. "You will, perhaps, think it strange, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "that having known you so short a time, I should have recourse to your kindness at this moment. But, in the first place, I can trust you, and then you will easily see why I am anxious to leave in your hands this parcel, which contains my last behest."

The Marquis gave a slight start, but did not speak.

"If I come back," Guillaume continued, "you will return it to me." He paused again, and then went on in a hurried manner—"You know, and you are the only person here who does know, how it breaks my heart not to say good-bye to——O my God! my God!" In *b*

spite of all his efforts, a convulsive sob shook his breast; but this involuntary burst of feeling did not last more than a minute. He began to speak again in a more steady though hoarse voice, and very quickly, for he was aware he had no time to lose. “It is to *her*, Monsieur le Marquis, that you will give this parcel, should you hear—should you hear of my death.”

The Marquis squeezed his hand.

“You must be careful, for she loves me; and if it happens, it will be a terrible blow to her.”

Had not the darkness of the room prevented them from seeing each other's face, Guillaume must have perceived the effect his words produced on the Marquis. But he only felt his hand trembling in his own, and heard him promise, with an emotion which showed he was speak-

ing from his heart, that he would exactly fulfil his behest. With youthful warmth of feeling, he threw himself into the arms of the man who at that moment almost seemed like a father to him. The Marquis clasped the young man to his breast, and held him there for a second, mentally resolving to be strictly faithful to the charge committed to him.

Half an hour afterwards, Guillaume des Aubrys was gone, and the Marquis slowly walking back, with a heavy heart, to his lodgings in a street near Portman Square. He knocked at the door of a shabby-looking house. It was more than two o'clock, and his old servant had evidently been waiting anxiously for his return. He passed him by without speaking, and went into a small room on the ground floor, where a good fire had been kept up, and a slight meal prepared

for him. He made a sign with his hand that he wished the tray removed, and the discreet attendant, taking this as a hint that he wanted to be alone, quietly withdrew. As soon as the door was shut, his master threw down on the table his cloak and hat, and standing near the single lighted candle in the room, he drew from his breast pocket the parcel which had been entrusted to him, and read these words, written in a trembling hand—"For Monsieur le Marquis de Villiers, to be given by him, in case of my death, to Mademoiselle de Nébriant." He opened a bureau in a corner of the room, locked up the sacred deposit, and returning to the fireside, fell into so deep a fit of musing that, by the time he awoke from it and went up to his bedroom, the day was actually beginning to dawn.

CHAPTER II.

THE Marquis de Villiers was, at the time we have been speaking of, about forty years of age; and though he hardly looked as much, it was not strange that so young a man as Guillaume des Aubrys should consider him as quite an elderly person. They had met for the first time only about a month before the eventful evening just described, and no sort of intimacy existed between them. Guillaume shared all M. de Villiers's political opinions—he acknowledged his merits, and respected his character; but, in spite of himself, he could not help entertaining a sort of dis-

like to him, which it was evident, by many unmistakable tokens, that the Marquis fully reciprocated. Guillaume troubled himself, however, very little about it. M. de Villiers had made his appearance one night at Mrs. Percival's, where he himself spent the greater part of his time; and there was nothing surprising in this, for that lady had once been called the Comtesse de Nébriant, and the Marquis was her cousin. For many years, indeed, there was not the slightest intercourse between them, for he looked upon her second marriage, which had taken place since the emigration, as an unpardonable *mésalliance*. But Mrs. Percival had not noticed—or, at any rate, resented—his neglect. For four years she had been living quietly in one of the suburbs of London, devoted to the education of her own child by her

first marriage, and of Dr. Percival's daughter by his first wife. In this humble retirement her days had been spent in peace and happiness, only clouded by the grief which the state of affairs in France occasioned to all the French exiles. The two girls, who were about the same age, and brought up together as sisters, were as fond of each other as if they had been children of the same parents. Good gentle Louisa Percival looked up to her French sister, as she used to call her, with a boundless admiration, and a kind of reverence inspired by affection, and not at all by the difference of rank which existed between them, and which the most nobly-born of the two thought still less of, if possible, than her friend.

Charlotte de Nébriant at the time when we introduce her to our readers,

was in truth a singularly attractive creature ; tall, graceful, distinguished-looking, her lovely head adorned with a mass of fair golden hair surrounding her head like a halo, her lips opening with a sunny, radiant smile, and disclosing a row of beautiful teeth, the expression of her large, childlike blue eyes, smiling as merrily as her lips, and at other moments full of a grave, sweet earnestness, so that people were tempted to exclaim at one minute, "What a darling !" and at another, "What an angel !"—a hackneyed expression, but one not altogether without meaning, for it does not often rise to the lips at the sight of a merely handsome face—of one whose countenance does not convey the idea of a more celestial beauty, an inward loveliness of which the external features are only the image and counterpart: and

Charlotte's beauty was of that sort. So thought the Marquis de Villiers when he first saw her at a public concert, to which, somewhat in departure from their usual retired habits, Dr. and Mrs. Percival had taken their daughters. Both the girls were dressed in white. It was the fashion at that time in England to wear white muslin gowns in the morning, and perhaps we may be allowed to remark that it was a pretty and becoming way of dressing, and fulfilled, better than many recent inventions, what we may presume to be the object of all such fashions, however extravagant—that is, to soften ugliness and to improve natural advantages. At any rate, Charlotte looked wonderfully pretty in her white attire, and though wearing what everybody else wore, she attracted more notice than any other

person in the room. But so little was she aware of the general admiration she excited, that it was only when a young man, almost as fair and as handsome as herself, came and sat by her side, that a slight blush deepened the colour in her cheeks. When he whispered occasionally a few words in her ear, she smiled, but without ceasing to attend to the music, which seemed to be to her a new and intense pleasure, judging from the expression of her face, and the exclamations of delight she could not restrain.

Never had the Marquis de Villiers been so struck with any one. It may be as well, before proceeding with the story, to say a few words concerning his character, and the previous circumstances of his life. Less, perhaps, from a respect for virtue, than out of

pride, and a spirit of contradiction, he had never fallen into the excesses into which men of his rank and age were too often wont to plunge. He had in his youth loudly anathematised the corruption and frivolity of that old-fashioned French society which, at a later period, he had defended with a kind of intemperate vehemence, together with the whole state of things connected with it. At twenty-five years of age he had made himself conspicuous by a misanthropical tone of mind, which in him, however, was not affectation. The way in which men of his standing spent their lives, seemed to M. de Villiers utterly contemptible, and he would have been glad to employ in a different manner his time and energies, for his heart was good, and in spite of an offensive amount of pride, there was something

noble and generous in his disposition. He would have been capable of self-devotion, tenderness, and even passionate affection, but feelings of this sort were not thought of at the period when he made his entrance into the world. An *effete* and profligate society, possessed with that spirit of pride and recklessness which is at once the presage and the prelude of great social and political disaster, was at that time hurrying into the abyss with careless levity—turning into a jest everything in heaven and on earth, and leaving behind it a memory which after ages would have branded with disgrace, if, by the trials which renewed, the courage which ennobled, the torrents of blood generously shed which redeemed it, and by the struggles which attended its renovation, it had not shown that, like the maiden raised by the

touch of our Lord's divine hand, it was not really dead, but slept. Only in its case death had been a delirious dream—waking, a long expiation.

M. de Villiers had been, in his youth, the object of innumerable maternal speculations; there had been no lack of wealthy and noble brides proposed to his acceptance. But he had steadily declined to marry, and nobody knew the reason of this determination. The real fact was that it proceeded from a tolerably correct, though imperfect, knowledge of his own character. He did not, probably, admit that he was proud, imperious, and haughty. No; those who have faults of this kind generally call them by the names of their kindred virtues—firmness, high-mindedness, and strength of character. But the Marquis was quite aware that he was irritable, violent, and subject

to paroxysms of anger of which he often felt ashamed. "If I married," he thought, "I should be obliged to amend my temper, and I do not feel disposed to take that trouble; or I must find a wife who will not mind my bursts of irritability. Now, it is only where a woman loves that she excuses her husband's defects, and what chance is there that a little minx who would come out of her convent on the day before her marriage, after only having had a glimpse of me through the grating, should fall in love with a husband whom she would look upon merely as the necessary condition to her wearing a court dress, going to Versailles, and heaven knows where besides? No—I am better as I am; and my brother, if he chooses, may marry, and save the family from becoming extinct."

Of this kind were the things he said to himself—whereas his friends all declared that he would one day atone for his fastidiousness by committing some egregious piece of folly in the way of marriage. But graver and more anxious thoughts soon put a stop to these jests. The impending storm was gathering, and its first symptoms beginning to appear. The Marquis de Villiers was one of those who most clearly discerned its scope. He did not for one moment deceive himself with the idea that it would prove an imaginary danger or a short crisis; he estimated at the first the importance of those premonitory signs, but his clear insight only served to intensify that hatred and abhorrence of all that he foresaw would follow, and to strengthen his determination to oppose by every possible means the new, and as yet un-

tried, order of things, which was about to supersede the fabric now tottering to its fall. Many of his friends were leaving France, and it would have been natural, in the state of his mind at that time, that he should have followed their example. But this did not suit his ideas, or his character ; to struggle to the last, and die in the contest, should it prove unsuccessful, was his first thought and firm intention. But an unexpected blow changed the whole tenour of his feelings on the subject ; his brother, to whom he had always been affectionately attached, took a line exactly opposite to his, and suddenly became a strong partisan of the revolution. In order to escape from the pain, which was in his eyes a disgrace also, of meeting such an adversary in the arena of political warfare and civil strife, the Marquis emigrated. Once

beyond the frontiers of France, it became difficult to return, and for nearly twenty years his lot was cast with that of the French exiles ; those victims of a noble sense of honour, who, in spite of the errors, illusions—faults, as some will have it—with which they have been so bitterly reproached, nevertheless, maintained most worthily, in every country where they sought shelter, the dignity of the French name, and gained for it the love and veneration of those upon whom it was about to burst in all its might and glory.

CHAPTER III.

IT may seem extraordinary that such a man as we have described M. de Villiers to be, should, at the age of forty, and, in spite of his habitual fastidiousness, have been so greatly struck by the beauty of a young girl as to fall in love with her at first sight—a thing which, it cannot be denied, occasionally happens, though, we are ready to admit, very seldom. The Marquis de Villiers, however, was doomed to prove one of these unfortunate exceptions to the rules of common sense. As soon as he had seen Charlotte, it seemed as if he could not take his eyes off her face. He was

standing in a corner of the room where he could watch her unperceived, and during the whole time of the concert he did nothing but gaze on what appeared to him a perfect vision of youth and beauty. When the music was over, and he awoke, as it were, from this trance, he felt an irresistible impulse to follow, and, if possible, to find some excuse for speaking to her. At all events, he resolved not to let that bright apparition vanish from his sight, leaving him in utter darkness.

Every one was moving, and he was about to press forward and to act, perhaps, in rather a strange manner, when he suddenly caught sight of Mrs. Percival, who had been sitting, concealed from view, at the end of the bench furthest from her daughter. He had not seen her for four years, but he

recognized her at once, and at the same moment guessed that the lovely girl he had been gazing at must be his young cousin, Mademoiselle de Nébriant. Providence had indeed favoured him, he thought. In an instant he made his way through the crowd to the place where they were standing, and though he had not seen Mrs. Percival since her second marriage, he did not hesitate to go up to her and claim, in a frank and graceful manner, a renewal of their former intimacy. Mrs. Percival was charmed to meet again a friend connected with all the dearest recollections of her youth. She greeted him with perfect cordiality, and presented him to her husband. The warmth with which the Marquis shook hands with Dr. Percival was elicited, no doubt, by the secret delight he felt at the discovery he had

made. He offered his arm to Mrs. Percival; the doctor took care of his daughter, leaving Charlotte to follow with the fair young man. As Mrs. Percival was taking leave of the Marquis she said, "I must introduce to you my daughter." And Charlotte's beautiful eyes were raised towards him for an instant with their most grave expression. "And this is my step-daughter," she added, turning to Louisa. The Marquis bowed a second time, but without taking the trouble to look at Miss Percival.

The doctor, his wife, and the two girls, got into the carriage; the young man jumped on the box.

"May I come and see you?" the Marquis said.

"Yes, by all means," Mrs. Percival answered; "you will find us at home every evening." And just as they were

driving off, she gave him a card with her address.

M. de Villiers stood for a moment in the street with this card in one hand, and his hat in the other, in rather a strange attitude, which the wondering glances of the passers-by at last made him conscious of. Then, recovering from his fit of absence, he quietly put on his hat, pulling it down over his eyes, and went back to his lodgings in a very different state of mind than when he had gone out a few hours before.

The following day, at eight o'clock in the evening, M. de Villiers was at Kensington, knocking at a door on which was to be seen the name of Elm Cottage. He was soon admitted, and shown into a drawing-room opening on a green lawn, where several persons were sitting under the shade of a large

catalpa. He felt a little embarrassed at first, but his cousin's cordial welcome soon put him quite at his ease, and his inward agitation subsided. He glanced at Charlotte, and thought her looking still more beautiful than the day before. He also condescended to take notice of Louisa's sweet and intelligent countenance. A young man was sitting with them, but not the same he had seen at the concert. This one was taller, paler, and looked very grave; he had made a slight bow when the Marquis arrived, and then sat with his arms crossed over his chest, listening when Charlotte spoke, but saying nothing, unless she asked him a direct question.

It was getting dark, and for this, or some other reason, the conversation, which had been at first rather animated,

was beginning to flag, when a knock at the door made Charlotte start, and a moment afterwards the fair young man of the day before, over whose absence the Marquis had been secretly rejoicing, appeared on the stone steps, and came into the garden. Charlotte blushed, and the young man who was sitting by her immediately gave up his place to the new comer, who, after shaking hands with Mrs. Percival, took possession of it as a matter of course. The Marquis's heart sank within him. We can hardly venture to say how keen was the pang he felt at that moment; he saw at once how the case stood. It now only remained for him to learn the name of the favoured lover. When it was mentioned, it proved by no means unfamiliar to him.

“Guillaume des Aubrys,” Mrs. Per-

cival said ; “ the brother of poor Raoul, you know.”

And the Marquis did know, for the tragic death of the young Vendean hero had been a common sorrow to all the adherents of the cause for which he fought and died.

“ Guillaume and Charlotte are engaged,” Mrs. Percival whispered to M. de Villiers, “ and will be married in a month.”

The rest of the evening was painful to the Marquis, and, as he was walking home, he questioned with himself whether it would not be wise in him not to go again to Elm Cottage. Up to that time his life had been a sad one indeed, but it had at any rate been marked by the dignified consciousness of a supercilious indifference. Now he felt as if that proud self-sufficiency which he valued so

highly was threatened by the existence of a feeling which it would be difficult to disguise without an amount of self-control he was not accustomed to practice, and yet which he could not reveal without exposing himself to ridicule—in his eyes the worst of all evils. For some hours he had nearly made up his mind to leave London, but the irresistible longing to see Charlotte again, and to continue his visits to his cousin's house in the character of a relative and friend, which had been so readily conceded to him, overcame that more prudent resolution. “After all,” he thought, “I shall suffer if I go, and I shall suffer if I stay; on the whole, I like better to suffer by staying than by going.” And accordingly the next day, and every following day, till the evening on which the meeting we described took place,

saw him at Elm Cottage, where he always received a most kind welcome.

Our readers can now understand the cause of the Marquis's agitation when Guillaume chose him as the depository of his last behest, and why his hands shook when he received the parcel which Charlotte's lover left in his care. They can also imagine how great must have been the struggle of conflicting feelings within him. On the one hand that of pity, joined with a deep sense of the sacred nature of the trust reposed in him, and on the other those fierce emotions of love and jealousy which had been the torment of his life during the whole preceding month. It was not in human nature that he should not experience an involuntary relief at the suspension, at any rate for a while, of this torment. Guillaume was gone; he did

not allow his mind to dwell on anything beyond that simple fact. For a few days, perhaps for a few weeks, he should be spared the pain of witnessing his happiness. As to the perils of the dangerous enterprise in which Guillaume was engaged, he tried to keep them out of his mind, and to think only of the favourable chances attending it. He recoiled, with a sort of instinctive terror, from the thought of the opposite issue. His generous nature could not endure the consciousness of the selfish and horrible joy which that prospect might awaken.

The first thing he had to consider was, what he would have to say if Guillaume's absence was mentioned before him. But this point was speedily set at rest by the first words which were addressed to him when he went to Elm

Cottage. Though Guillaume had not had the least idea the day before that he should be obliged to start so suddenly, he was sufficiently aware of the object of the meeting to know what sort of expedition would be proposed, and on that account he had told Charlotte that he had promised to join a party of his friends in Scotland for a few days' grouse-shooting, leaving it, purposely, uncertain which day he would go and how long he would be away. He had fully intended, however, to take leave of her before his departure, and had even resolved to tell her the whole truth, relying on the courage which is given to women as well as to men in times of great public emergencies. He did not, therefore, look upon that previous interview as a parting one; still, when at the moment of leaving her, he had said,

as he kissed her hand, "My own! soon to be mine for ever!" a terrible pang shot across his heart, and, not to betray his agitation, he was obliged to turn away abruptly.

But Charlotte was at an age when we cannot believe in anything but happiness. There was not the faintest shadow of a cloud on her brow when she saw the Marquis on the following day, and she herself explained to him the reason of Guillaume's absence, in the most natural manner possible. She was neither sad nor anxious. Guillaume was gone on a party of pleasure. He was to come back in a few days, and then it would be very near the time when they would be for ever united.

Nothing occurred for some days to disturb Charlotte's peace of mind, or the undoubted enjoyment which the Marquis

found in his evenings at Elm Cottage since Guillaume's departure. It had been the habit of the engaged pair to come in from the garden when it grew dark, and to spend the greatest part of the evening at the pianoforte. They sang together, which was only another way of conversing. Sometimes Louisa's voice was added to theirs. Dr. Percival greatly enjoyed these little concerts, and so did the tall young man who was sitting under the catalpa tree on the day of the Marquis's first visit. He had since been introduced to him. His name was Henry Devereux. He did not join the singers—he did not even look at them; but he used to listen to the music with great attention, and sometimes even with visible emotion. As to the Marquis, he positively hated that pianoforte, behind which the young lovers passed such

happy hours. It was, therefore, no slight improvement in his destiny to find Charlotte sitting at a table where he could also sit and talk to her and before her, whilst she worked, and sometimes to see her raise her head with a pleased smile. This was almost like happiness in comparison with the misery he had gone through; and so, without reverting to the past or looking onward to the future, forgetting Des Aubrys and forgetting himself, he lived on from day to day in a kind of blissful dream. More than a week had passed, and he still felt as if Guillaume had only been gone for a few hours, and he had not made a single inquiry as to the result of the expedition he was engaged in.

One evening—it was the 12th of September—the little party at Elm Cottage was sitting as usual round the

table, when Henry Devereux, who was reading the newspaper, quivered from head to foot, and after giving a hasty glance around him, folded it up quickly and put it into his pocket. Neither Charlotte, whose head was bent over her work, nor anyone present, noticed this action, except the Marquis. Henry Devereux saw that he had perceived it, and made him an almost imperceptible sign, which M. de Villiers understood. He got up, and going to the window, turned round in a natural manner, and said to him, "What a beautiful night it is! Come and take a stroll in the garden." He opened the window and went out.

Henry Devereux joined him in a minute or two, and, passing his arm in his, led him away towards an alley on the other side of the lawn. When they

were at some distance from the house, he said, "I am not in your secrets; but you can trust me. I am a friend to your cause. There is a paragraph in this newspaper which frightens me; for—for *her*"—and he glanced in the direction of the drawing-room—"she must not see it, unless you are satisfied and can assure me that Des Aubrys is really in Scotland, and not elsewhere."

The Marquis considered within himself for a moment, as to the prudence of giving a direct answer to this question. "What does the paragraph say?" he inquired.

"It says that twenty Frenchmen left London about the 25th of August, and landed on the 28th or 29th on the coast of Normandy, on their way to Paris, where they intended to raise a band of malcontents in sufficient force to attack

the First Consul in the midst of his troops ; but that the plot was discovered, and the conspirators pursued, and that they are all at this moment in prison, whence, there is no doubt, they will be sent to the scaffold. Des Aubrys's name is amongst them ; he is even specially designated as the brother of the royalist of that name who was killed in La Vendée."

The Marquis had made up his mind that it would be quite safe to trust Henry Devereux, and he replied without hesitation, "That expedition did take place, and Des Aubrys was amongst those twenty."

There was a long silence. The same thought was prominent in the minds of the two men as they walked to the end of the alley, and half way back again, without uttering a word. At last the

Marquis said, "The best thing for the present will be to keep that newspaper out of her way. It is just possible the news may be false. In the mean time I will make every inquiry, and to-morrow we shall know the real state of the case."

They shook hands, and returned towards the house. As they approached the window, they saw Charlotte and Louisa, who had both come out to admire the beauty of the stars shining in a cloudless sky. The air was more balmy and soft than is often the case in northern climates. Not a leaf was stirring, and except where the deep shadows of the trees fell on the lawn, the moon was shedding so bright a light on the grass, that it would have seemed easy to count the little daisies which enamelled its smooth surface.

It was one of those nights that, even more than the most brilliant sunshine, seem to convey to the soul a promise of peace and happiness, and if it understands and accepts that pledge, the soul believes and hopes in something more true and real than what is called in this world truth and reality ; only sometimes it misapprehends the extent of the promise and the time of its fulfilment, and applies to this life what is meant for eternity. It was even thus with poor Charlotte at that time when—with her head upraised, her hair waving, and her eyes fixed on the starry sky—she was, as it were, inhaling hope and joy. The beauty of the night, the perfume of the flowers, the sweetness of the air—the whole world seemed in harmony with the feelings which filled her heart. Her mother had followed her out of doors,

and thrown over her head a thin white shawl, which fell in transparent folds round her slight figure. Thus gracefully clad, and standing in the pale moonlight, she looked so like a heavenly vision, that the two men, who were emerging from the dark alley, stopped short at a little distance from her, struck with the same feeling—one of intense admiration, mingled at that moment with the most heart-breaking pity. Henry Devereux's eyes filled with tears. M. de Villiers was not so visibly moved, but deeper and more agitating thoughts were at work in his breast. They stood for a while gazing on Charlotte, and not venturing to speak to her; and it was well they did not. It was well they left her to dream, to exult, and to rejoice in that hour, the like of which she was never to know again; for through a long course

of future years it was doomed to live in her memory as the one in which her young heart had enjoyed the last smiles, and taken a last farewell of earthly love and joy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Marquis de Villiers had taken leave of his cousin an hour sooner than usual, and was walking home very fast, when it suddenly occurred to him, just as he was going to cross the Park, that it was only ten o'clock, and that it might still be possible to ascertain that evening what truth there was in the report he had seen in the newspaper. He thought of calling for that purpose at a house in a small street at the furthest end of Pall Mall, the same which we have already had occasion to mention. It was not ostensibly a place of resort for the *émigrés*; but, from the fact that it was

entirely inhabited by Frenchmen, it naturally became one of their habitual haunts, and it was always there that the earliest intelligence as to news generally interesting to their party was sought for and obtained. The Marquis hesitated a little about going so far out of his way ; but just as he was debating the point in his own mind, somebody coming from the Park passed him very quickly, and in doing so looked hard at him, as if trying to make out who he was. He also cast an investigating glance on this person ; but it was too dark for them to see each other's face, and the stranger went on. The Marquis watched him for a moment, and then, having made up his mind to go to the house near Pall Mall, he crossed the road, and walked very fast in that direction. The moon was now shining on the side of the

pavement he had taken, and it was almost as light there as if it had been day. Suddenly, he perceived that somebody was following him; at any rate, he heard steps behind him which seemed to be measuring their pace on his. He hurried on, carefully listening to ascertain if this was really the case. To test the matter, he went on slower for a little while, and then whoever was behind him went slower also; he then almost ran, and the footsteps likewise changed to a run. Upon which the Marquis stopped short and turned suddenly round. London was at that moment full of agents of the French police, whose business it was to watch the proceedings of the *émigrés*; and he had no notion of arriving at the house of his friends thus escorted. Turning, therefore, as we have said, suddenly

round, he confronted the man who was dodging him, and at once recognized the person who had passed him before. He went straight up to him, and, though very little inclined just then to merriment, he could hardly help laughing when he saw a well-known red-faced individual, panting with the effort of keeping up with him.

“What! is it you, La Mothe!” he exclaimed. “Thank God! This is providential. I need not go any further; you can tell me all I want to know.”

Our readers will remember that it was in M. de la Mothe’s room that the last interview between Guillaume and the Marquis had taken place. The chief business in life of that good man was to find out and retail amongst the French exiles all the news that could interest them.

When he recovered his breath, he stammered out—"And who the deuce did you think was at your heels?"

"Why, my dear friend, I thought it might be somebody whom I had no wish should see me go into your house. It was for your sake I went slow and then fast, and then ended by coming suddenly back upon you. And it was lucky I did so, for you are the very person I wanted to see."

"And I wanted, too, to see you. I did not know you again on the dark side of the street. I was longing to tell you all I have heard, and to know if you have had any further details. Good God! was there ever such confounded ill-luck!"

"I know nothing but the dreadful report," the Marquis said. "I want to hear the truth of it." They were stand-

ing together, near the railing of the Green Park, and glanced around them to see if they were alone. There was nobody on that side of the pavement. "Is the news as bad as I have heard?" M. de Villiers asked.

"Bad?" La Mothe repeated. "Why, it is as bad as anything can be. They are all taken; no doubt, by this time, tried, which means, of course, condemned to death."

"All of them?"

"All but two."

"Which two?"

"Des Aubrys and Saulny."

The Marquis seemed hardly able to make out the sense of those last words. His heart was beating violently, and the blood rushing to his head. La Mothe went on—"It was that first terrible catastrophe that saved Saulny; other-

wise he would have been taken with Cadoudal and the rest, and poor Guillaume also. So that, on the whole, it was better perhaps as it was."

"What do you mean?" the Marquis said, controlling his agitation.

"Well, that it was better for poor Des Aubrys than to be executed, even though in such good company."

"But I thought you said that Saulny and Des Aubrys were safe—that they were come back?"

"Saulny is come back. I have seen him. But Des Aubrys—then you don't know what happened?"

"No, I told you I know nothing. Good heavens! can't you speak! For God's sake, don't keep me on tenter hooks!"

"Well then — but I suppose, of course, you know when and where

our poor friends were to land in France ?”

“Yes ; on the coast of Normandy, by the cliff——”

“Exactly ; by the cliff at Biville. Three hundred feet high ! It is dreadful to think of. And you know how they ascend ?”

“Yes ; by means of a rope with knots, I suppose. It has often been done.”

“Yes ; a rope is fastened at the top of that perpendicular rock. It is wonderful, really, how many people have been able to make the ascent. And to think that the boldest, the most active—and we might well add, the bravest—who tried it——”

“For heaven’s sake, no digressions,” the Marquis ejaculated. “I want facts—only facts.”

“Now don’t be impatient with me, my dear friend. Let me give you the sad account in my own way. I am unhappy enough as it is. This is exactly what Saulny told me. He will not get over it for a long time, I can assure you. Well, it seems that the weather was dreadful that night; so dreadful, that when they got near the cliff, all of them, and even the leader himself, thought that it was impossible to attempt the ascent that night, and that they ought to wait till the next day. Guillaume alone urged that they would be losing precious time; and that if they could not all scale the cliff in that fearful gale, there was no reason why one of them at least should not accomplish it, and give notice of the approaching arrival of the rest to their friends, who might otherwise be discouraged and disperse. He

said that, being the youngest and the lightest of the lot—ah ! he might well have added the bravest, too—he begged to make the trial. They all objected at first, and tried to dissuade him ; but at last his urgency prevailed, and it was agreed upon that he should attempt the ascent. He was put in possession of the necessary pass-words ; the most important documents were secured within a belt round his waist ; and then, laying hold with his hands and his feet of the fatal rope, the signal was given, and in a second he was drawn up out of sight.” Here poor La Mothe covered his face with his hands, and murmured, “It is too shocking.”

“Go on, go on !” the Marquis cried, deeply agitated.

“It seems that at that moment a tremendous gust drove the vessel away

from the coast. The wind was blowing from the land, fortunately for those on board of her, but not for poor Guillaume, who was twice lifted up by the violence of the hurricane, so that those who were looking down from the top of the cliff saw him in an almost horizontal position, holding on by the rope, but unable to climb. They made, on their side, the most desperate efforts to draw up the cable with his weight attached to it—but they were struggling against the hurricane, and the wind was more powerful than all their united strength. With horror, they saw him raised a third time in that terrible manner ; then a cry was heard—only one—and all was over.”

“ O my God ! my God ! ” the Marquis moaned, with his face hidden in his hands. He who, a moment before, had felt it difficult to resist a painful feeling

when he thought Guillaume had come back, was now weeping—yes, bitterly weeping—over the certainty that he would never return.

La Mothe was sobbing also. However, he soon added the few remaining details he had to give. When the storm subsided, and daylight came, poor Guillaume's corpse was found. His companions committed the care of his lifeless remains to M. de Saulny, his friend, and, except himself, the youngest of their number. He conveyed them to England, and sadly and reverently consigned them to a humble grave, at the place nearest to the coast where a Catholic priest could be found to perform over them the offices of religion. The papers Guillaume had taken with him were removed; but the little crucifix which was hanging round his neck was buried with him. It

was found clasped in his right hand, a token, no doubt, of what must have been his last act and his last prayer at the moment when he loosed his hold of the rope, on which the fate of his young life depended.

M. de Villiers remained for some time silent after the narrative was ended. He seemed oppressed, bewildered, and in a state of gloom so much resembling despair, that La Mothe was quite frightened, and told his friend that if he had had the least idea that the Marquis was so much attached to Des Aubrys, he would never have informed him of his death in so abrupt a manner.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER a night of the most intense agitation, during which he had not even attempted to lie down, and when he had somewhat recovered from the bewilderment into which La Mothe's account of Guillaume's tragical end had thrown him, M. de Villiers thought with terror of the duty which had devolved upon him. Every word and circumstance connected with his last interview with poor Des Aubrys recurred distinctly to his mind, and every other feeling was absorbed in that of a profound compassion, deepened, or rather, perhaps, sharpened by remorse at the remem-

brance of thoughts and wishes which he had indeed struggled against and repelled, but which, nevertheless, seemed to upbraid him now with having in some sense desired the catastrophe which it was his terrible task to break to Charlotte. He was tempted to curse the strange fate which had made him, of all people, the depository of Guillaume's last wishes and the bearer of this appalling news to the woman he loved. He had, however, accepted the charge, and perform it he must. Des Aubrys's words, which had so often rung in his ears, seemed to haunt him now with fearful distinctness—"You will take care how you tell her of my death, for she loves me, and the blow will be a terrible one."

There was no time to lose; the blow must be inflicted on one whose happiness

he would willingly have died to secure. He felt he must provide against her hearing suddenly what it might kill her so to learn. In a few hours the news would be in every one's mouth. The newspapers had already adverted to it. The newsmen might be even then vociferating it aloud. He trembled as this occurred to him, mused for a minute or two on the best course to pursue, hesitated a little, and then made up his mind. About two hours after sunrise, he went down to his sitting-room, opened his bureau, took from it a sealed parcel, and went out.

It was a fresh bright morning. Charlotte, delighted with the beauty of the weather, was sitting, at about nine o'clock, at the window, paying apparently more attention to the trees and to the sky than to the book in her hand.

Louisa was writing at a table near another window, which looked on that part of the garden on the side of the entrance door. The room which the two girls jointly occupied was a pretty one ; large, cheerful, and sunny. It bore, as rooms sometimes do, the stamp of the tastes, pursuits, it might almost be said of the characters, of those who inhabited it. There were plenty of books on the shelves on both sides the chimney. The blue-papered walls were adorned with religious pictures, and between two little white beds stood a beautiful ivory crucifix, and a *prie-dieu* before it wide enough for two persons to kneel on it at the same time. An abundance of flowers on the tables mingled their perfume with the sweet scents which a soft autumnal breeze was wafting from the lawn ; and everything in this peaceful home-sanc-

tuary seemed to speak of piety, study, youth, and happiness.

The bell of the garden-door rang. Louisa looked up from her writing, and saw that it was the Marquis coming in. He said something to the servant, and then, with his back leaning against the wall, and his arms crossed on his chest, he stood waiting. Louisa was quick-sighted, self-possessed, always more mindful of others than herself. These qualities gave her a good deal of presence of mind, and a power of perceiving promptly, and acting judiciously, in cases where there was a need to be met or a danger to be guarded against. The very moment she set eyes on M. de Villiers, a sudden terror shot through her mind. She could see him from where she sat, though he could not see her, and was at once struck with his

paleness, the strange look in his face, and a sort of gloomy despondency even in his way of standing. All this, together with the unusual hour of his visit, made her suspect that something was amiss. But she did not utter a word. Two thoughts were uppermost in her mind: Charlotte in the full security of her happiness, and Mrs. Percival always more or less ailing and suffering from a disease which the least emotion increased. She had to consider how to deal with them both, in what, as a presentiment told her, was going to prove a terrible moment. She got up, but before she could reach the door, a servant opened it. Before he had time to speak, she said,

“ Show M. de Villiers into the library. My father is out, but I will go down to him directly. Do not on any

account let Mrs. Percival know he has called."

Upon this, Charlotte exclaimed, quite surprised, "What do you mean, Louisa? Have you heard anything that you have not told me?"

"No, nothing whatever, I assure you. I give you my word of honour, I have not," Louisa answered; but as she was going out of the room, one of those sudden instincts of the heart, which are almost like inspirations, made her turn back and say, "Charlotte! dearest Charlotte, I know nothing. I have heard nothing. But in case, dearest, in case we should be about to hear of some great misfortune, let us ask of God to give us strength to submit to His will, whatever it may be."

She kissed her sister, and left the room. But those words were not uttered

in vain. It sometimes happens that persons are saved from death by a branch which breaks their fall, and though it wounds them on the way, they reach the ground bruised, indeed, and perhaps with broken limbs, but alive. And those words of Louisa's served the same purpose. They precipitated Charlotte from her pinnacle of security and happiness, and threw her into an agony of apprehension, of which Guillaume was, of course, the object. For it is ever thus : the mind flies to whatever is most dear and precious ; it passes in an instant through every stage of fear and hope, terrified, but yet refusing to admit to itself the possibility of a misery, by the side of which all other miseries would be as nothing. The unhappy girl kept repelling with all her might the bare idea of such a grief as was, alas ! hanging

over her head; but it was, perhaps, those minutes of cruel suspense which saved her life under that crushing blow.

Louisa stayed away about half an hour. Then she came in with a face as white as a sheet, and red swollen eyes. Charlotte was kneeling before the crucifix. When the door opened, she started up. The two girls looked at each other, and Charlotte gave a fearful cry. Louisa threw her arms around her, forced her back to the *prie-dieu*, and fell down with her before the crucifix. It was there Charlotte received from her trembling hands the sealed parcel; it was there she heard from her quivering lips the fatal news; it was there that the flood-gates were opened, and the full tide of sorrow poured its deep and bitter waters over her young head; it was there that for many a long hour she remained,

prostrate and almost lifeless, in a deep swoon or in speechless anguish. When she opened her eyes again, it was almost dark. Above her, the white form of our Lord on the cross was faintly visible. It seemed to be looking down with divine pity on His child, weeping and suffering at His feet.

A writer of our day—Alfred de Vigny—has said that there is not a more fearful encounter than that of youth and despair, when they meet in a human heart. Fearful, indeed, is such an encounter; but it can never exist when faith has not first died away. Faith sanctifies and consecrates the hard and painful union of youth and sorrow, and sometimes makes it lasting in this world, for faith is the guardian of holy affections as well as of eternal hopes; it forbids us to forget, it sets its seal on

all the sacred treasures of our lives. But from every soul where it ripens it banishes despair; despair, the gloomy tenant of mean and effeminate hearts; despair, with its ghastly train, crime, madness, and suicide, or its less dark but miserable sequels, reckless dissipation, contemptible weakness, wretched oblivion of past joys and past sorrows.

No; despair never came near Charlotte de Nébriant's heart. In the midst of her anguish she heard those mysterious accents which from the heights of Calvary descend into the lowest depths of affliction, and bring to the soul not consolation only, but, we might almost say, a strange nameless joy, which the world does not dream of. But that awful and divine language is never heard but when the shattered heart is utterly

desolate, and not even a ray of human consolation shines on its darkness.

There is little to relate concerning the year which followed that sad day. Guillaume's death did not bring about any apparent change in the habits of the dwellers at Elm Cottage. To the eyes of indifferent persons it was just the same peaceful quiet abode it had always been. A landscape, in the same way, is not changed because the sun has ceased to shine upon it. The brightness of Charlotte's smile, which had been the sunshine of that home, had for ever passed away. After a long illness, she had recovered both her strength and her beauty, which had been for a short time impaired. But, like her life, her beauty had undergone a great change. She had wished to wear mourning for Guillaume, as if she had been his wife; and when

the Marquis saw her again, for the first time after his death, she was dressed like a widow. She did not seem to him a whit less lovely in that mournful garb : her sorrow only served to increase the affectionate respect, the silent worship, he paid her. No change took place in their mutual intercourse, or in his daily visits. They were his only enjoyments in life, and he felt so persuaded that an unguarded word, or even look, might lead to the loss of that happiness, that he kept a strict watch over himself, in order not to betray the least token of a feeling beyond that of friendship.

Henry Devereux, also, continued to come every evening to Elm Cottage. He was always speaking of leaving London, but never seemed able to fix a day for his departure. The Marquis and he became much greater friends. They

were, indeed, as intimate now as was possible for two persons of such different ages and position.

Charlotte, though she did not sing any more herself, was fonder than ever of music. When Louisa played on the pianoforte, she liked to withdraw into a dark corner of the room, where her tears fell unobserved. Henry would then sit a little while by the instrument, and when, after Louisa had done playing, he talked to her rather longer than usual, a momentary gleam of pleasure shone in Charlotte's blue eyes. One day, when this was the case, the Marquis's eyes happened to meet hers. She glanced at Henry and Louisa, as if to communicate to him her impression, in hopes he would confirm it. But he read more truly Devereux's heart than she did, and shook his head. Though she did not perceive

the meaning of the look he at the same time fixed upon her, she felt disappointed that her mute question had not received the answer she wished, and the animation, which had for a moment appeared in her countenance, passed away, and gave place to its now habitually sad expression.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Marquis de Villiers had led a very solitary life ever since he had been in England. He did not mix at all in society, not even in that little world of voluntary exiles who were reconstructing among themselves, and out of France, that great French world so lately destroyed ; preserving its semblance with a puerile, but touching solicitude, discouraged by no amount of privations, cheerfully resigned to a poverty which no false shame embittered, accepting all its consequences, save that of seeking or receiving alms, and keeping up with the most minute care the habits, the tradi-

tions, and the manners, as well as the forms of speech of the past. They were even afraid to learn the language of the countries where the emigration had cast their lot, for fear of losing their thorough French accent, or rather the accent of the society to which they had belonged. Thus, after twenty-five years of exile, they returned to their native land, speaking a language almost forgotten by that time in France, and which, though sometimes incorrect, was never vulgar, and though seldom eloquent, was always dignified. Pleasantly in our ears does that French of the old school still sound, when we happen to hear it spoken by the rare survivors of that era, or by those who have lived in their society. We enjoy it, as in England those most opposed to the order of ideas which inspired the old Jacobite songs will take pleasure in listening to them.

No one took any notice of M. de Villiers's new habits of life. He was seen in society neither more nor less than before; and he went on leading that half agreeable, half tormenting, existence which had become dear to him, without attracting the attention of his countrymen. It was not now the dangerous pleasure of Charlotte's presence alone which drew him to Elm Cottage. He had begun fully to appreciate his cousin's society, and even Dr. Percival's, and had long ago got over the feeling of pride which had led him to dislike Madame de Nébriant's second husband. He now understood the meaning of the English word gentleman, and its difference from its apparent synonym of *gentilhomme* in French, which necessarily implies nobility of birth, whereas the word in England has a far wider scope, and applies to all

whom nature or education endows with that nobility which they are generally acknowledged to have the right and power to bestow. In this sense, then, Dr. Percival was a most thorough gentleman. He was also a sincere and fervent Catholic, and felt that ardent and devoted attachment to his faith which persecution—then still existing in England in the shape of penal laws, and in the social habits of mind of its people—so often produces. He had been unwearied in his devotion to the *émigrés*, and especially to the priests, who had escaped imprisonment or death in France, and he ministered to their wants with the reverence due to men who have confessed their faith at the peril of their lives. He also deeply loved his country ; and his strong attachment to it made him hail as a probable result of the generosity shown at that

time by all classes of Englishmen to the French exiles, to priests as well as laymen, a return to those principles of equity which, for the sake of his native land as well as of his faith, he so ardently desired to see prevail. It was then, indeed, that the first dawn of that approaching light was seen ; and though it was rather longer, perhaps, than the good doctor expected before its practical results appeared, nevertheless, after the lapse of twenty years, justice raised its voice in the midst of the English nation, and, in the name and by the help of freedom, won for the ancient faith a standing-place, which may yet be assailed, but which it can never lose again. In the course of his visits to some of his poor French patients, Dr. Percival had accidentally entered the shabby little room where the Comtesse de Nébriant was

wearing out her strength in secret toil and suffering by the sick bed of her child, working all night, and yet by that almost incessant labour scarcely able to procure the medicines which the little patient needed. How many women, nursed in pomp and pleasure, went through that noble heart-breaking struggle, proving themselves, by the manner in which they accepted that stern fate, worthy of the brighter lot which their birth had seemed to promise them! In Dr. Percival the Comtesse de Nébriant found a friend and a protector, and her child a father. Our readers have been introduced to the peaceful home which his kindness made so dear and bright—the home where Charlotte tasted the first and sweetest joys and the most acute sorrows of her life.

One day, as M. de Villiers was coming

in, his servant Thibault gave him a parcel of letters and some visiting cards. He looked first at the cards. One of them was Henry Devereux's, and there was written upon it in pencil—"I shall come back in an hour. Wait for me if you can."

"M. Devereux said he would come back soon," Thibault said.

"Very well," M. de Villiers answered. "Show him upstairs, and do not let in anybody else," he added, feeling sure that Henry must have something of consequence to say, and with some anxiety as to what it might be about. He glanced rather absently at the covers of his letters. One of them was from Mrs. Percival; it was to ask him to dine at the cottage that day, and this pleased him. Before he had time to open any others, there was a rap at the

door, and before Thibault could announce him, Henry Devereux was in the room.

“Oh, I am so glad you have come in,” he exclaimed. “I was so afraid you might be out for the day, and that I should not see you to say good-bye.”

“Are you going away then?” the Marquis said. “When, where, and for how long?”

“Read that,” Henry said, giving him a letter, which M. de Villiers read from beginning to end. It contained the offer of a good situation in the Civil Service in India, and held out excellent prospects for the future, which, however, involved an absence from England of fifteen or twenty years.

“Well?” the Marquis said, looking inquiringly at his friend.

“Well, I have accepted the offer, and I am off to-morrow.”

“What! going to India for fifteen — twenty — twenty-five years perhaps? Why, at your age, it is like going away for ever! Without any joking, do you really mean you are going?”

“I am quite in earnest. I have made up my mind to go. There is nothing to keep me in England, in Europe, or, indeed, as I feel at this moment, in the world. But I know that is foolish, and it might be worse than foolish if I gave way to that feeling. A man always has, or ought to have, something to do in this world. But, however, the sooner I go the sooner I may hope to return, fit to be of some use.”

“You go to-morrow, and for twenty years perhaps!” the Marquis again ejaculated.

“Why, what does it signify?” Henry replied. “I have no ties, no interests,

no duties here ; not even any relations except an old uncle, who does not like me any the better for being his heir. I am just the sort of man who ought to go to India, and work his way to fortune there. What is wanted for it is energy, activity, and perseverance. I have, I suppose, about as much of those qualities as my neighbours, and, in addition, I possess a very important qualification which few of my countrymen enjoy."

"What do you mean?"

"I have no home to leave—no home to regret. You have lived long enough in England to understand what we mean by that word. You know all it comprises for an Englishman—how many things, great and little, combine to form the links which bind him to it. His home means his country, his fireside, the woman he loves and has married, or

hopes to marry, his garden, his fields, the common over which he gallops after a long day's hunting, the comfortable room where he sits with his friends by a good fire—all this, and much more than this, goes to make up our idea of a home. You can, therefore, see that a man who has no home in this country must be delighted to go to India; and it will probably be owing to this fortunate circumstance that you may hear of my dying some day, a judge at Madras, or even Attorney-General at Calcutta."

"Come, Devereux!" the Marquis said; "what does all this mean? Tell me the real truth about it. I suppose you did not come here in order to throw dust in my eyes. What has made you take this sudden resolution?"

Henry remained silent for a moment, opening and shutting a book he had

taken off the table. Then suddenly throwing it down again, he said, "Well, I will tell you the truth, and, indeed, I always meant to do so. The fact is, I have been fool enough to propose to a woman who will not have me."

The Marquis started. "Have you?"

"Yes. Is it not strange that a man, who is neither a child nor an idiot, should go and ask a woman to marry him without having the least idea that she likes him, and, indeed, with the conviction that she has loved, does love, and will always love another man, as much since his death as during his life. Is it not a most unaccountable piece of folly?"

M. de Villiers made no reply; and without noticing his silence, Henry went on—"But there are times when a person seems to lose every atom of good

sense. She seemed a little more cheerful than usual. I happened to be alone with her in the garden. She was talking very kindly to me, and all of a sudden I spoke out. The truth is, that it gets at last too painful to be always concealing, hiding, shutting up what one feels. You can have no idea of what that suffering is, or how intolerable it becomes; and really you will hardly believe it, but if it was still to do, I would do as I have done. I know that it is all at an end! that I am going away; that I shall never see her again. And yet, in spite of all this misery, I cannot describe to you what a relief it is, almost like happiness, to think that she knows it now; that I am concealing nothing from her; and that for once in my life I was able to tell her how dearly I love her—that I began to do so the

first day I saw her—and that I shall do to the last day of my life!”

Whilst Henry was speaking in this excited manner, the Marquis remained cold, passive, apparently calm, his head resting on his hand, and listening to him without raising his eyes. At last he said, “And have you told them what you intend to do?”

“Yes; I did so last evening. This letter reached me some days ago. I answered it yesterday, and then went to Elm Cottage. They all seemed sorry. Charlotte was paler and sadder than usual—she knows why I go. Miss Percival, too, looked very grave; and when she wished me good-bye, there were tears in her eyes—she is such a dear good soul.”

The Marquis looked at Henry when he said this, and saw by his manner that

he had not the least suspicion of what he thought he had himself clearly discerned, and he said nothing, for even to hint at it would be, he considered, a want of respect for Louisa, and almost a breach of confidence. When he had got over the first painful impression which Henry's disclosure had produced upon him, he tried, but without success, to induce him to alter his resolution. Devereux had examined his conscience, questioned his heart, and pronounced a verdict on himself like that of a judge, or rather of a physician, who measures at once the extent of the evil and the only remedy which can touch it.

“There is in such cases,” he said, “but one thing to do—to suffer, and to accept suffering without any weak mercy towards oneself. Yes,” he added after a pause, “to suffer dreadfully, and then

get over it. That is what I look forward to; and for that purpose a journey, or temporary absence, is not enough—there must be a total separation, both as regards time and distance. That remedy must work a cure at last. There can be no love strong enough to survive that ordeal; and though it is like applying hot iron to a bleeding wound to think I shall never see her again or hear her name mentioned, a time must come when the healing process will take effect, and the wound will at last be seared—and it is to that result I must look.”

“I have nothing to urge in reply,” the Marquis answered; “and if your object [is to recover peace of mind by forgetting the past, I cannot deny that the resolution you have taken is the surest way to succeed.”

“It is not merely tranquillity of

mind that I think of," Henry said. "I do not want to get over this feeling merely in order not to suffer, but with a view to action. Our duty lies in action. The real worth of life consists in the power to act, and we must at any price maintain, or if we have lost it, recover that power. Were I to die in the effort, I should have only done a reasonable thing in wrenching myself away from the miserable state of apathy into which I should sink if I remained here. I should thoroughly despise myself if I could give way to such a temptation."

Sir Walter Scott describes in one of his novels the light heedless manner with which the young Duke of Rothsay flourishes a walking stick while standing by the side of a wounded friend. Every motion of his careless hand seems

to threaten the sore and quivering limb, and he unconsciously inflicts a kind of torture on his favourite. Every word Henry Devereux had said produced, morally speaking, a somewhat similar effect on M. de Villiers. His sufferings during that conversation would be difficult to estimate. At last he said, "For you who are young, who have life before you, and a country to serve, the violent remedy you have determined to employ is, as I said before, the surest and best. I understand your reasons, and approve your conduct. In the case of a person differently situated, free from those cravings for life and action which belong to youth, and with no patriotic object in view to stimulate his energies, I could fancy, indeed, that the words of the song Miss Percival was singing the other day might very naturally, and without any

despicable weakness, express his feelings—

O heal me not my woe, mither,
Cure me not my pain,
I love them, and of them, mither,
To die I were fu' fain."

As he uttered these words, the Marquis rose; and though he tried to smile, his features were so painfully contracted and his whole manner so strange, that Henry seemed surprised and puzzled. But he concluded that what he had said had awakened in the Marquis's mind painful thoughts relative to the bitter and always increasing trial of exile. This supposition prevented him from attaching any other signification to his words. It was only years afterwards, when he had been long separated from the Marquis by time and absence, that he understood their meaning.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was late when Henry took leave of M. de Villiers, who had only time enough to dress in a hurry and jump into a hackney-coach—one of those heavy old lumbering hackney-coaches which used to serve, indeed, to keep our feet out of the mud or dust, as the case might be, but scarcely to convey us to our destination more expeditiously than by walking. As he went slowly along, the Marquis revolved in his mind what he had heard from Henry. It struck him as strange that it should have been his fate for the second time to hear an avowal of another person's love for

Charlotte, and though there was no similarity in the circumstances of the two cases, the coincidence, as regarded himself, was curious enough. On the whole, he felt considerably relieved by what had taken place. A year had now elapsed since Guillaume's death, and though he was convinced she would never care again for any one as she had done for him, he had sometimes speculated, knowing how much she appreciated his merits, whether, when she came to be aware of Henry's attachment, she might not be induced to marry him. This had been the subject of many an anxious thought. He felt greatly relieved at finding she had refused him; and when he saw her again, Charlotte seemed to him more lovely and charming than ever.

Louisa was not in the room when he

arrived. The only guest that day was a young French priest, who, like so many others, had been attended in sickness by Dr. Percival, and after having been his patient, was now his friend, and often his guest. His name was the Abbé Gabriel de Merian; he was generally called the Abbé Gabriel. Louisa did not come in till after the small party had sat down to dinner. "Poor girl," the Marquis thought, "she has probably been crying her eyes out, and is afraid to appear." He considerably avoided looking at her till he could do so unobserved, and then he was surprised to see that though she looked rather pale, there were no traces of tears on her face, or of any violent emotion. She was, perhaps, somewhat more silent than usual, and when she went into the drawing-room, he saw that she hastily shut up the

pianoforte, and blew out the candles, which stood there lighted as usual; but except these trifling marks of feeling, he could not see anything to confirm the impression which had led him to think of her with so much sympathy and pity. "I must have been mistaken," he thought, "and I am very glad of it."

If he could have heard her that night repeating aloud the prayer for travellers, he would, perhaps, have observed that her voice faltered, and have detected an extraordinary earnestness in the tone of that supplication. But it was only the friend kneeling by her side, and He who saw them both weeping that night at His feet, without saying a word to each other of the cause of their sadness, that heard that prayer, and witnessed those tears.

In the mean time the Marquis, who was in very good spirits that evening,

was doing his best to enliven the conversation between the doctor and the Abbé, which seemed rather inclined to flag. The latter appeared completely engrossed by a newspaper which he was reading.

“M. l'Abbé is very much absorbed,” the Marquis said; “he does not seem inclined to return to our argument of the other night, and prove to us that everything is always for the best. That I ought, for instance, to be extremely obliged to those who would have cut off my head if I had given them the opportunity; and that he himself, who was all but murdered, owes, of course, an infinite amount of gratitude to those worthy people who meant to have thrust him so expeditiously out of this wicked world.”

The Abbé had indeed been wounded,

and left for dead in the midst of a heap of corpses, on the day of the massacre at the Carmes. Saved, in an almost miraculous manner, from the fate that awaited him, he had been brought to London, and if he had desired it, would have been free to return to the world, for he was not, as yet, bound by any vows ; but he remained faithful to his vocation, and as soon as his wounds were healed, and his strength sufficiently returned to allow him to perform the duties of the priestly office, he was ordained.

In answer to the Marquis's attack, he looked up and smiled. The sweetness of his smile and of his countenance gave a remarkable expression to a face which would otherwise have been plain.

"You are right, Monsieur le Marquis," he said ; "I own that I cannot feel angry with anyone. If this be a

fault, I accuse myself of it, and must try to amend. There are always some words in the Gospel which strike a man more than others ; those I seem to think of oftenest are these—‘Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.’ When I remember when and where, and by whom they were spoken, I cannot harbour resentment against those poor people who tried to put an end to my life. It is not even an effort for me to forgive them, so little anger do I feel.”

The Marquis said nothing ; perhaps he was touched by what the young Abbé had said. But he now began again to argue.

“But all those fine reasonings, my dear Abbé, would end in their being no distinction left between good and evil. We should not be at liberty to think

anybody a rascal or a wretch—not even that Buonaparte.”

“Gently, gently!” the doctor said; “M. l’Abbé will not let you attack even Buonaparte.”

“Not attack Buonaparte!” he exclaimed. “I hope you are not in earnest, doctor, and that M. l’Abbé does not push so far the consequences of his charitable system. That individual knows pretty well, I fancy, what he is about; it would be rather difficult to suppose that he sinned out of ignorance.”

The Abbé would have liked to withdraw at once from this ticklish ground, but he thought it right to say, in a gentle manner, “I cannot but bless the hand which has thrown open again God’s ruined and deserted temples.”

“And the hand which deluges Europe

with blood; do you bless that hand?" the Marquis asked, in an ironical tone.

The Abbé sighed, and pushing away from him the newspaper, said, "No, indeed; and God knows that when, in spite of myself, I am excited and interested by the account of a battle, I am ashamed of it, and feel as if I had failed in one of the duties of my sacred calling."

"Has there been a battle?" the Marquis asked.

"Yes, a great and terrible battle."

"Ah, indeed; and where?"

"Near Austerlitz, it seems."

"Austerlitz—is that a village, or a town?"

"It is a castle in Moravia, I think," the Abbé answered. "The Emp—— Buonaparte was there on the eve, or the morrow, of the battle."

"Nobody ever heard of the place,"

the Marquis said, with increasing ill-humour.

“I think its name will never be forgotten,” the Abbé rejoined, “after what has taken place there.”

“And I suppose it has been another defeat?” the Marquis cried, with a frown.

The Abbé Gabriel seemed taken aback at first. “A defeat!” he exclaimed; but, correcting himself, he said, “well, yes, a defeat if you will—a new victory of the French army.”

The Marquis took up the newspaper, read the account of the battle, and then threw it down in silence. He remained all the evening in a state of gloomy abstraction.

His was indeed a painful state of feeling, and one which appears to us unnatural and almost revolting, now that

the lapse of time has made it impossible ; but in the eyes of the Marquis de Villiers the glory of France was all that time disgraced by an indelible stain. Unfaithful to her traditions, and untrue to her King, France had in his eyes no right to be great and glorious, and he lamented, without scruple, over every step of her victorious march, because each such step was leading her further from the path outside of which success seemed to him unlawful, and glory questionable.

CHAPTER VIII.

M. DE VILLIERS came home in an exceedingly bad temper, and when he saw Thibault with the same packet of letters in his hand which he had forgotten to open when he went out, he asked him, in an impatient manner, what he wanted, and desired him to leave them on the table. Thibault made no reply, but followed him to his bed-room, and before assisting him to undress laid the letters on the chimney-piece. As he was leaving the room, he turned round and said, "I don't know if M. le Marquis has noticed that one of those letters is from France. I thought he

would wish to read it before he went to bed."

The Marquis was by this time sorry to have spoken crossly to the old man, and said, in quite a different manner, "Are you tired, Thibault?"

"No, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Oh, well; but you had better go to bed. Good-night, Thibault."

"Monsieur le Marquis is very good. Good-night, Monsieur le Marquis."

Having made this sort of tacit apology to his old servant, M. de Villiers seized the letter, and tore open with so much haste the one which bore a French postmark, that he did not perceive that it was sealed with black. It was three years since he had received a letter from home. The first words that met his eyes were these: "Monsieur le Marquis, —It is with the deepest grief that I

write to inform you of the death of M. le Vicomte de Thénin.”

The letter fell from the Marquis's hand. Fifteen years had elapsed since he had read that name, or heard it pronounced. He had expressly forbidden that in the occasional letters he received from home any mention should be made of that brother whom he had at one time so dearly loved. He had tried to forget him, and he fancied he had succeeded. This was, however, a mistake which did injustice to his own feelings. He read over and over again the words that had so deeply affected him, paused a moment, and then all the love and tenderness so sedulously kept down for years asserted their power, and seemed to rush into his heart with uncontrollable violence. After having so long left the past in oblivion, and resolved not to acknowledge as a brother the

soldier of republican France, he could now think of nothing but the days of childhood and youth, and of the more than common attachment that had existed between that brother and himself; so devoted and exclusive, that it had made other friendships superfluous, and even distasteful to him.

The Marquis leaned back in his chair, and without attempting to struggle with his feelings, or calling to mind any of the circumstances which had, as he thought, justified his long estrangement from his brother, he gave way without restraint to the grief which was re-awakening in his heart all his former affection for him, and it was with a sort of tender sorrow that he kept repeating the name which for fifteen years had not passed his lips. "Roger, Roger!" he kept exclaiming, with the accent of other days; and in

the midst of this intense grief a divine voice was perhaps whispering to his soul a secret reproach which he would never listen to before, for passions—and not only vile and selfish passions, but those also which sway and deceive the noblest minds—easily silence heavenly warnings ; perhaps that voice was now asking him, with irresistible power, why he had permitted the fitful opinions of a transitory world to prevail over the holiest and deepest feelings of his nature, and voluntarily to sunder a tie which death had now destroyed. It was some time before M. de Villiers regained sufficient composure to take up again and read the following letter :—

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS,—It is with the most profound regret that I have to inform you of the death of M. le Vicomte de Thénin. He died gloriously in the great battle which

has just taken place. I venture to hope that this will not be in your eyes an additional cause of reproach against his memory ; and I cannot bring myself to believe that you will be displeased at my infringing your command never to mention the name of him whom we have lost. You are aware, M. le Marquis, that although, in consequence of the laws against the *émigrés*, M. de Thénin became, twelve years ago, the nominal possessor of all your estates, which would otherwise have been confiscated, he would never touch one penny of the income, and after he had entered the army refused to appropriate to himself even his legal share of your patrimony. He lived and died as a soldier, and used to say to me, "My pay is sufficient for my wants ; my brother will come one day into the full possession of our maternal inheritance, and will not have the annoyance of thinking that a single stiver of it has gone to benefit the revolution. In this respect, at least, it will have been useful to him to have had a republican brother." Though this was said with a smile, he adhered strictly to his resolution. You will remember that when the law was passed three years ago which allowed the *émigrés* to return to France, and resume the

possession of their property when it happened not to have been sold, I wrote to you to say that your estates were at your disposal. This I did by M. de Thénin's orders, though I did not at that time venture to mention his name. But it would go against my conscience now not to state the fact. I must also renew my entreaties that you will come to France, if it be only to furnish me with the necessary powers for the management of your estates, should it be your desire that I should continue to administer them, as I have hitherto done at M. de Thénin's desire, and out of friendship for him, though more in your interest than in his.—I remain, Monsieur le Marquis, your sincerely devoted servant,

PIERRE SEVERIN.

M. de Villiers continued for some days so depressed in spirits that he could not bring himself to go out at all. He wrote to Mrs. Percival and told her of his brother's death, and of his sorrow, without alluding to the estrangement which had existed between them. The next time

he came to Elm Cottage he brought with him the letters he had received on the subject, and gave them to his cousin to read. He talked over their contents with Charlotte and Louisa, and his brother's name, which he had so long refused to utter, was now continually on his lips, and he even spoke with as much moderation as it was possible for him to command of the circumstances which had brought about their separation.

“And who is this Pierre Severin who was so much attached to your brother?” Mrs. Percival asked.

“The most honest, intelligent, and high-minded of men,” the Marquis replied.

Great was the surprise of the three persons who heard him give this answer, for it was a rare thing for M. de Villiers to praise any one very much, and in this

instance he was warmly commending a man whose opinions were diametrically opposed to his own, which made the eulogium still more wonderful.

Mrs. Percival could not refrain from saying, "But was not he of the same way of thinking as poor Roger?"

"Well, he was always more or less of a visionary about politics, though a man of great energy and activity in other ways. He was an intimate friend of Roger's, and though much the younger of the two, had great influence over him. His dangerous illusions at the outset of the revolution may have greatly contributed to lead my brother astray. But there is this to be said, I do not consider that every one is bound by the same obligations; what in the Vicomte de Thénin I thought dishonourable—or, at least, blameable—conduct, was excusable

in Pierre Severin. A man like him, though belonging to an ancient family of legal eminence, was not attached to the throne by the numberless ties which bind to it the descendants of its hereditary defenders. I must also mention that when the Utopia dreamed of by the earlier partisans of the revolution made way for all we saw and knew, he left Paris and the bar, where he had made a brilliant *début*, and retired to the little town of M——, near Villiers, where he became the advocate and protector of all those whom the barbarity and iniquity of the times were pursuing. This could not long go on with impunity. He was seized, thrown into prison, and would probably have been executed, if Roger had not interfered: and in order to keep him out of the way of dangers which his generosity would have made him con-

tinually incur, sent him to Villiers, of which he was the nominal possessor, and constituted him the agent of the property—more as an excuse for keeping him, than for any other reason. But Severin did not accept that position as a sinecure, and he has managed the estates so well ever since, that if ever I return to my old home, I am likely to be a richer man than I have ever yet been. He is really an excellent fellow, clever, active, a good scholar, and as brave and noble-hearted a being as ever existed.”

This panegyric was well calculated to ensure for Pierre Severin a most cordial reception when, some time afterwards, he came to England. The Marquis obstinately declined to avail himself of the facilities afforded to the *émigrés*, and his agent, tired of useless entreaties on the subject, determined at last to cross

the channel himself. His return to France was a matter of some difficulty, but he managed, nevertheless, to accomplish it successfully, after spending two months in London, and he then carried home with him from Elm Cottage a remembrance and a hope which he looked to time and his own constancy one day to realize.

CHAPTER IX.

FOUR years had elapsed since the occurrences related in our last chapter, and nothing of importance had marked for Charlotte the passage of time, except the sure though gradual decay of her mother's health, when an unexpected and sudden event threw the whole family into the deepest affliction. Dr. Percival had been devoting his time and assiduous care to the sick and dying soldiers sent back from the pestilential shores of Walcheren. In the exercise of these charitable duties he himself caught the fever, and died in a few hours. It was about six weeks after this sad loss that

M. de Villiers was told one day when he arrived at Elm Cottage that his cousin, who had been very unwell for some days, was wishing to speak to him. She was so altered since he had last seen her that he could not conceal his surprise and distress. Mrs. Percival smiled sorrowfully, and said, as she held out her hand to him, "I see you are grieved, my dear Gaston, to see me so ill."

M. de Villiers kissed her thin, burning hand. "I heard you wished to speak to me," he replied, "and so I came; but had you not better wait till you are a little stronger?"

"No, no," Mrs. Percival hastily rejoined; "I have no time to lose, and must make the most of the little strength I have left." She sat up on the couch where she had been lying, and con-

tinued—"What I want to say to you is so important, and at the same time so strange, that I cannot put it off. The peace of my remaining days, and of my dying hour, depends upon it. I shall not be able to rest till I have had this conversation with you."

The Marquis felt alarmed at her look of weakness, and still more at her agitation; but sitting down by her side, he gently said, "I am quite ready to hear whatever you may have to say, and I can assure you beforehand that there is not any one in the world more entirely devoted to you and yours than myself."

"I know it," she answered; "and I am about to give you a convincing proof of how fully I believe you. Gaston, it is about Charlotte I want to speak to you." M. de Villiers felt nervous. Mrs. Percival went on—"Until my last

great sorrow came upon me, I grieved indeed over my child's blighted happiness, but I felt no anxiety about the future. I knew I must soon die, for I have long been aware that my case is hopeless, but I felt I should leave Charlotte and Louisa to the care of an affectionate father. I did not think it necessary to say or recommend anything concerning them. I was so certain of his kindness and prudence, that it seemed unnecessary to sadden them all by speaking of my approaching death. I had nothing to suggest to one who had always thought and acted for me and for them far better and more wisely than I could have done myself." She paused a moment to wipe away the tears which were streaming down her face. M. de Villiers was kindly and anxiously listening to her. She continued—"But

God only knows what I have suffered during the last month. I have felt not only the wish to live, but a sort of feeling that I *must* live; that I could not die leaving behind those two girls without a friend. O Gaston! it has been a terrible trial! Thank God, the Abbé Gabriel was near me. By his help I recovered peace—in a great measure at least. He persuaded me to leave my child in God's hands, and to trust that those He cares for are well cared for." She stopped again to take breath, and then said, "I do not know if it was a reward for that act of faith, but no sooner had I made, in the midst of my anguish, that act of resignation to the divine will, than a thought came into my mind which has never since left it. At any cost, and in spite of the difficulty I find it in, I will simply tell you what

it is, and in the same way you must answer me." She fixed her large sunken eyes on her cousin's face, and said, "Gaston, would you marry Charlotte?"

If a pistol-shot had struck the Marquis in the breast, it could hardly have startled him more. The object of his fondest dreams had seemed so utterly beyond the region of possibility, that nothing in what Mrs. Percival had said had at all prepared him for those last words. He turned as pale as death, and his heart was beating so violently that he was quite unable to speak. The long and complete restraint he had put on his feelings had become like a second nature to him, and the sudden transition from one state of mind to another gave him a sensation more akin to pain than to joy. He kept staring at his cousin without making any answer, and

this silence lasted so long that Mrs. Percival misunderstood its cause. A slight blush rose in her pale cheeks, and she said, "You must allow, Gaston, for the feelings of a mother. My confidence in you has perhaps carried me too far. I have always been used to think Charlotte so charming, that I concluded too easily that everybody must admire her, and I had taken it into my head that you liked her."

That he liked her ! Poor Mrs. Percival ! if she had known how far short of the mark were the words she employed, if she could have guessed how deep and passionate was the love for her daughter which existed in the heart of the man she was speaking to, she would, perhaps, have foreseen that the life she was planning for her would hardly prove as calm a one as she imagined.

By degrees, and with a strong effort, M. de Villiers succeeded in mastering his agitation, and in a voice which still faltered a little, he said, "But would Charlotte consent? Would she agree to it?"

"I do not mean to say," Mrs. Percival replied, "that she is in love with you. Certainly not. But I am sure she has a very sincere and heartfelt regard for you, such as I am sure you have for her; and I know she would much rather marry a person who had that sort of feeling for her than a warmer one, which she would not be able to return."

These words seemed to run through the Marquis's heart like the cold blade of a knife; but he answered with an emotion which made what he said almost unintelligible—"I need not tell you that what you suggest would never have

crossed my mind as a possibility. I had rather not speak of my own feelings—you may be quite easy about them. Charlotte's are what we must think of. If you really believe she would consent to be my wife, all I can say is, that my heart and my life are at her disposal. But, of course, the decision must rest with her." He kissed his cousin's hand, and went away like a man moving about in a dream.

There was a sweet and kind smile in Mrs. Percival's face as she followed him with her eyes. She knew M. de Villiers's long-standing reluctance to marry, and ascribed to that cause his hesitation and silence when she had first broached the subject. But she now felt quite relieved; his last words had shown her that he not only consented, but gladly agreed to what she had proposed, and from Charlotte,

whose feelings she had sounded before speaking to him, there was no reason she knew of to apprehend any serious objection to this marriage. The wound in her young heart had never healed; and her mother was right in thinking that she would have refused any proposal prompted by feelings she could not reciprocate. But she did not dislike the thought of marrying a man old enough to be her father, who would be her friend, and expect nothing more from her than the deferential and affectionate attachment which she already felt for M. de Villiers. “It will not be happiness,” she said to Louisa, “but it will be better than happiness—it will be rest. My life will be devoted to the fulfilment of important duties, and have, no doubt, some enjoyments also. And after all, dearest, what does that earthly

happiness, so eagerly desired, so ardently pursued, amount to—I mean, that boundless intense happiness I had once a glimpse of? We are never sure of it for an hour, and there is no proportion between the enjoyment of it, great as it is, and the anguish, the horrible anguish which follows its loss.” She shuddered, and hid for a moment her face in her hands. The fearful remembrance of what she had suffered was passing through her mind. But she looked up again, and fixed her eyes on the sky with a calm and trustful expression. Wiping away her tears, she said, “There are times, dear Louisa, when I can feel glad, really glad, to have known and understood this before I was twenty.”

She had trod the rough ways of sorrow, and had early reached the heights whence we discern life as it

really is: "Not always happy, but always full of a severe beauty, and beautiful because of that severity—one of its characteristics, and of its noblest attributes."* Young as she was, Charlotte, as she said, had understood this thoroughly, and well would it have been for her if the man whose destiny was about to be united to hers had learnt the same lesson, and practised the same wisdom!

* Madame Swetchine.

CHAPTER X.

CHARLOTTE, in her white wedding dress, looked prettier than ever, and though her face was very pale, there was something serene and sweet in the expression of her countenance. A sharp pang shot through her heart as she awoke on the morning of her bridal. The past rose before her so keenly and vividly that her courage would perhaps have failed, had it not been for a few kind comforting words from the Abbé Gabriel, which strengthened her resolution, and enabled her, after an hour or two of fervent prayer, to kneel at the altar with peaceful composure. Her mother saw no

traces of tears on her face when she returned from the church, where she had not been able to go herself; nor did M. de Villiers's anxious, jealous eyes, discover the least token of agitation or regret in his bride's looks and manner. Not a cloud obscured for him the unlooked-for happiness of that day.

Mrs. Percival did not long survive the marriage, which had relieved her mind from a heavy load of care. After her death, Charlotte and her husband, and Louisa with them, went to reside in a house by the sea-side. It was there that they spent the first years of their married life—the last of their stay in England, for events were now at hand which seemed to justify all the predictions of the Marquis, and to harbinger the hour he had so long and earnestly looked forward to. After an exile protracted

through the dreary lapse of two-and-twenty years, he was at last able to return to his own country, and more fortunate than the greater number of those in his position, he found his property, through his brother's generosity and his friend's faithful devotion, almost uninjured by the shock which had convulsed the soil of France. Whilst in most other places the land was strewn with ruins, or disfigured with erections so miserably inferior to what had been destroyed that they only seemed a worst species of ruins, the ancient walls of the old Château de Villiers had preserved all their former grandeur; the magnificent tapestry in its splendid rooms was uninjured, and the portraits of a long line of ancestry remained undisturbed in their places, with not one of the illustrious names or armorial bearings on their

frames defaced or mutilated. Pierre Severin had watched with filial reverence over every memorial of the past, and with a kind of fatherly solicitude over the interests of the future.

If the Marquis de Villiers's youth had been saddened by many a heavy trial, Providence seemed to be making up to him for those sorrows by showering upon him in his later years blessings in abundance. He was returning to his native country, which at one time he had scarcely hoped to see again, in company with his long-exiled sovereign, and in the midst of that fervour of patriotic excitement which is one of the most entrancing emotions which can fill the heart of man ; and to his ancestral home he brought with him, to be its mistress and its queen, the woman whom he had worshipped in silence through years of

poverty and exile, without ever supposing that the dream of those days would become a reality. And by the side of the beautiful mother was a fair child, the heir of his name and possessions, whose birth, three years before, had filled up the measure of his happiness—his son, the joy, and now the pride of his life. And Charlotte, as she leant on her husband's arm, and held her boy by the hand—was she not happy also, with her loved sister accompanying her, and the faithful friend who had secured to them this ancestral time-honoured home, welcoming her on its threshold with joyful looks and words? Why did a cloud now and then flit across her brow? What was the secret anxiety which now and again disturbed the tranquil serenity of her sweet face?

Before we search into the cause of

this disquietude, let us follow the master of the Château de Villiers, his wife and his guests, into a large dining-room, brilliantly lighted by a magnificent lustre and a cheerful blazing fire. Everything was gay, bright, and comfortable, in that stately apartment, where the Marquis and the Marquise, sitting opposite to each other, were doing for the first time the honours of their table to a number of friends and neighbours assembled to welcome their arrival. A look of pleasure was beaming in every face. As to Pierre Severin, it was with difficulty he repressed the exuberance of his spirits, for in addition to all that made that day a blissful one to him, was not Louisa sitting by his side? Louisa, looking just as she did at Elm Cottage, just as she had dwelt in his memory ever since his visit to England, more lovely than

pretty, more intent on diffusing brightness around her than on shining herself, her large eyes full of that rare and admirable simplicity, that innocent boldness which belongs to those who never think of themselves, or that others are thinking of them ; that glance, so open, so pure, so fearless, and which the lines of the favourite poet of our younger days so admirably describe—

Ses paupières, jamais sur ses beaux yeux baissées
Ne voilaient son regard d'innocence rempli.*

Pierre did not address a single flattering speech to his neighbour, but he spoke as a man does when he is anxious to make himself agreeable, and Louisa, by her answers, and sometimes by not answering at all, gave him reason to

* Her lids were never bent down over beautiful eyes
To veil their innocent gaze.

think that his efforts were not unsuccessful. In the meantime, on the other side of the table, there was—if not more happiness—a great deal more noise. Charlotte was quite surprised at the vivacity and merriment of her guests. Their animated conversation and joyous peals of laughter, seemed to inspire her with a gaiety to which she had long been unaccustomed.

Amongst the number of the happy friends seated at the banquet, was the Abbé Gabriel, who, greatly to his own satisfaction and that of all the inhabitants of the castle, was permanently established at Villiers. Though his birth might have entitled him to aspire to some of the highest dignities of the Church, the only preferment he had cared to obtain was the curacy of Villiers. That modest post completely

satisfied his holy and unworldly ambition.

Dinner was almost over, when the door opened, and a beautiful boy, with brown curly hair clustering about his lovely little face, came in; but, astonished at the sight of so many people, he stood still near the door.

“Come here, Guy,” the Marquis said.

But Guy did not budge.

Charlotte looked at her husband in an anxious manner, which seemed to annoy him. She coloured, and called the child, who, as soon as he heard his mother’s voice, rushed into her arms. She seated him on her lap, and drew him close to her heart with passionate fondness. As he was raising his little head to kiss her in return, the Marquis said, in a harsh voice, “Guy does not deserve to

have any dessert. Send him to bed!—it will make him remember to be more obedient another time.”

Charlotte became crimson, but taking out of the child's hand the biscuit she had just given him, she set him down on the floor, looking very red, and about to cry.

“Stop a minute,” some one cried; “do not send away that young gentleman—I really cannot do without him to-day.”

The speaker was, of course Pierre Severin. From the moment Guy had come into the room, Louisa had been absent and anxious, and as he watched every turn of her countenance, he also had perceived the little scene which had occurred. As he spoke, Pierre got up, and taking Guy in his arms, he stood opposite to the Marquis.

M. de Villiers's displeasure had subsided, and this happy intervention smoothed away all difficulty. He smiled a gracious assent to a request which he was in reality very glad to grant, even had it not been made by one to whom that day he could not have refused anything. So Guy was restored to his mother's knees, and Pierre, filling his glass, exclaimed, in a joyful manner—

“Gentlemen, before leaving the table on this, the happiest day of my life, let me beg of you all to drink to the health, the happiness, and the welcome home, of my friend and master, the Marquis de Villiers.”

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm, and when silence was restored, the Marquis rose, and in a voice which betrayed deep emotion, and with the softened expression in his face which sometimes

gave a great charm to his countenance, he said—

“Gentlemen, Pierre Severin calls me his master; he cannot then complain if I avail myself of this opportunity to give you some idea of the kind of servant he has been to me.” Then, calmly at first, and warming as he went on, M. de Villiers related all that had been done by his friend and agent during his long absence. He dwelt on Pierre’s devoted, faithful attachment, and the inestimable, never-to-be-requited services, he had received from this dear friend; and he would have continued much longer to indulge himself with the pleasure of praising him, if Pierre, who had unintentionally produced this public ebullition of gratitude, had not interrupted *his master* in an abrupt, impatient manner, not quite in keeping with the pro-

found respect with which he professed to look up to the Marquis. M. de Villiers laughed, and the rest of the guests joined in the laugh. Merriment then became general, and reigned throughout the whole of the day and the evening.

It was late when Pierre Severin took leave of Louisa. She wished to thank him for his little act of kindness at dinner, but as it might have been done not wholly on her account, and that it was, moreover, difficult to know how to express those thanks, she only uttered a few hesitating words, which conveyed to him, however, pretty accurately, what he wished to be assured of, and made him resolve to lose no time in bringing his cherished hopes to an issue.

CHAPTER XI.

PIERRE SEVERIN and Louisa Percival had been engaged for about a month, and were to be married in a few days, when one morning the Marquis de Villiers came into the room where they were sitting with Charlotte, and said, with a look of great pleasure, "I have just had a letter, ladies, from an old friend of ours. I think you will both be glad to hear the news he gives me. Only think of Henry Devereux being married!"

"No, really, is he married?" Charlotte exclaimed.

Louisa blushed a little, and smiled.

Pierre Severin said, "Well, that is

very good news. I am very glad to hear it."

"Did you know Devereux?" the Marquis asked with some surprise.

"I have never seen Mr. Devereux," Pierre answered; "but I know all about him, and feel most kindly disposed towards that good man. Indeed, I ought, out of gratitude, to wish him happiness more than any one else on earth, for I owe him my own happiness." This was said with a smile, and an affectionate pressure of Louisa's hand.

The pressure and the smile was reciprocated, and she answered with simplicity—"Indeed, Pierre, I am very grateful to him too that he went away without the least guessing that there was a little girl who would then have gone with him to the end of the world if he

had only thought of asking her. Oh, God has been very good to me!" she added, in an earnest manner, and with a look which showed her affection for him more than any words could have done. "How long has he been married?" she asked, turning towards M. de Villiers.

He did not reply immediately, and when she raised her eyes she was quite taken aback by the strange change which had come over his face. A moment before it had been calm and smiling—now a look of heavy gloom darkened his brow, and he was evidently so absorbed by his own thoughts that he had not heard her question. Charlotte, as much surprised and more alarmed at this alteration in his countenance, was gazing at him without speaking.

Louisa said again, in a timid voice,

“How long is it since Mr. Devereux has been married?”

The Marquis started as if out of a dream. “How long has he been married, did you ask? About a year, I suppose. He seems to have got on very well. His wife is a daughter of the Governor-General, I believe.” He uttered these sentences in an absent hesitating manner, as if unable to fix his thoughts on what he was saying; and then, apparently unable to master his unaccountable agitation, he abruptly left the room, walked quickly down one of the flights of stone steps into the garden, and disappeared amongst the trees.

Charlotte went out on the terrace, leaned against the balustrade, and followed him with her eyes until he was out of sight. Louisa saw her as she came back press her hand on her heart, as if it was

aching. Soon she called Guy, took him up in her arms, and went away without saying a word.

As soon as they were alone, Pierre said to Louisa, "What does it all mean?"

"I cannot tell, Pierre," she replied. "I cannot account for those strange fits of temper which so often grieve me, and make me anxious for Charlotte. She never complains, but I am sure she suffers, and yet I never venture to speak to her on the subject." Pierre thought a little, and then said, "I remember that Roger, who nevertheless adored him, used to tell me that it was his violent and uncertain temper which had prevented his marrying in his youth. But when I saw him in England, long afterwards, I must say that he seemed to me to have grown quite a different person. I

never noticed in him at that time any signs of irritability or caprice."

"Neither did I," Louisa answered. "During the three or four years that we saw him every evening, we sometimes thought him grave and silent, but nothing more than that."

"It is very strange," Pierre said. "Then it is since his marriage that he has been subject to gloom and irritation, and to such fits of temper as we have just witnessed?"

"No, it did not begin then. At any rate, I never observed anything of the sort when they were first married, nor for some time afterwards. Charlotte then seemed really very happy—more so than I had ever expected to see her after her great sorrow. Poor darling Charlotte!"

"That unfortunate Guillaume des

Aubrys quite idolized her, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course he did," Louisa exclaimed, clasping her hands; "how could he have helped it? You see what she is now, and she was ten times prettier then, and yet the loveliness of her face is nothing in comparison with the beauty of her mind and character. It was impossible to know Charlotte and not to dote upon her. That poor Henry Devereux, I am sure he would have died of love for her, if he had not taken a desperate step to cure himself of his attachment. I could see how he worshipped her, and I really believe it was that that made me care for him. I could so well enter into his feelings, and I was so sorry for him."

If ever a beautiful expression of sweet, unselfish tenderness beamed in a woman's

eyes, it was in Louisa's at that moment, and Pierre felt almost inclined to fall down at her feet. But the very excess of his affectionate reverence checked the admiring words which were rising to his lips; he feared to sully by praise that admirable and complete forgetfulness of self, the charm and merit of which consisted in her own perfect unconsciousness and simplicity. He contented himself with murmuring in a low voice, "Blessed be the happy blindness which kept Henry Devereux from reaping the benefits of that angelic pity!" and then he said, "But to return to Madame de Villiers, for I see now that to talk of her is the straightest way to your heart; tell me, did the Marquis know all that sad history about Guillaume des Aubrys?"

"Oh, yes," Louisa answered; "and it was he, moreover, who brought us

poor Guillaume's last bequest, and the news of his death. I shall never forget that day. But it has always been a wonder to me that M. de Villiers came to be entrusted with that sacred deposit, for I know that poor Guillaume had the greatest dislike to him." She stopped short after uttering these words, and then said, "But, by the way, now that I come to think of it, the mention of that locket brings to my recollection a circumstance which occurred about the time when Charlotte, who had seemed so much happier after her marriage, sank back into a state of despondency which I could not account for. It was a few months after the birth of Guy that I found her one day crying bitterly over that locket, which was broken."

"Broken?"

"Yes, the glass which covered the

hair was smashed to pieces, and the frame bent as if it had received a violent blow. She said she had let it fall, and asked me to get it mended. But when I had done so she would not take it back again; and I have kept it ever since."

Pierre remained silent for some time, engrossed with his thoughts. At last he said, "And the child? Is the Marquis irritable with him?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say he is; and though passionately fond of him, sometimes absurdly severe, considering his age. When he is not out of temper, he lets Guy have his own way in everything, which is equally bad, for, young as he is, the little fellow has fits of passion which ought to be checked. But what I cannot understand is, that his father is always more severe and im-

perious with him when his mother is in the room than at other times."

"It is very strange," Pierre answered; "and I am afraid it is also evident that that charming Marquise is not so happy as she ought and deserves to be, and that my dear good master does not prove himself quite worthy of the treasure he possesses."

This was a reproach which Pierre Severin himself did not seem at all likely to deserve.

CHAPTER XII.

It has been over and over again asserted that it is easier not to play at all than to play with moderation. Experience has often, however, disproved the general correctness of that axiom ; but it is hardly possible to imagine the case of any one persevering in playing without the least hope of ever winning. It was, nevertheless, something very like this that the Marquis de Villiers had done when he formed the resolution of never speaking to Charlotte of his feelings towards her. He thought that to tell her how ardently he loved her would be like soliciting a return which he knew it

was not in her power to make, and even like infringing the tacit condition she had annexed to the acceptance of his hand. Pride on the one side, and delicacy on the other, kept him silent. He was quite aware that the only person she had ever been in love with was Guillaume des Aubrys, and he had, at any rate, the consolation of knowing that no living person would ever dispute with him whatever amount of affection it was in her power to bestow, and for a time this seemed happiness enough. But such a state of things was by no means agreeable to the pride of the Marquis de Villiers. There was no vanity mixed up with that pride; still he could not help feeling conscious that there were many women who would not have been indifferent to his powers of captivation; few, perhaps, who would not have been

touched and won by the first deep love of a heart so long free from any passion of the kind, and now so completely absorbed and devoted.

“And why,” he kept saying to himself, “why am I obliged so carefully to conceal feelings I have a perfect right to avow? Why am I to hide them, as a thing to be ashamed of, from her who is the object of them—from my own wife? And why am I condemned to this silence? Only because a youth, a mere stripling, forestalled me, and stole away a heart which would otherwise have been mine. And what was the love of that boy of twenty but a fancy which the first woman he might have happened to meet with would have inspired? A fool, too, who madly surrendered the treasure he did not deserve to possess in order to rush into a des-

perate adventure, and sacrifice, from a blind thirst for revenge, Charlotte's peace and happiness—almost her life ! ”

These thoughts continually rankled in M. de Villiers's mind, and re-awakened the bitter feelings of former years, aggravated as they were by the rigid and unnecessary constraint he observed. For although it might have pained Charlotte if he had abruptly avowed that he was desperately, passionately in love with her, and that, moreover, that love was fierce, jealous, and exacting, though she would have been shocked if he had added that his hatred for one who had now been dead five years was as intense as ever, she would not have shrunk from opening her heart to him if he had tenderly and gently revealed to her the state of his own feelings. There was nothing in hers which need have grieved him.

The phantoms he was perpetually raising up in order to torment himself would have quickly vanished, especially when, after the birth of her boy, maternal affection and joy had taken supreme hold of her heart. But he followed, unfortunately, quite another line of conduct, and that ardently-desired happiness became a new source of suffering to him.

Charlotte was sitting one day by the fire when her baby was brought to her, for the first time in short clothes—that important event in nursery life which marks the transition from infancy’s questionable beauty to childhood’s enchanting loveliness. She jumped up with a cry of delight, and in one of those transports of joy to which all mothers are liable, she clasped her child in her arms, devoured him with kisses, and

showered upon him the most endearing, extravagant, passionate expressions of fondness. "Oh, my darling! my own boy! my precious one! You are too pretty—too dear! Oh, I dote upon you; I love you more than I can say—more than anything on earth!"

She did not measure her words; she hardly knew what she said. Between each exclamation she kissed her boy's little hands, his rosy cheeks, his soft eyelids and dark eyelashes, his curly brown hair. "Look at him, Gaston," she cried, at last; but Gaston had left the room, and was giving way to a gloomy fit of miserable jealousy! Poor foolish mothers! if the Divine Master took you to task for your unconscious rhapsodies, the best Christians among you might easily be found guilty of gross idolatry. If M. de Villiers's perverse

misgivings had not deluded him, he would have derived the greatest consolation and the sweetest hopes from that tender and joyful burst of maternal affection; but, on the contrary, ever since that day he looked upon his child, the lovely boy whom God had given to him as another rival in his wife's heart, and his secret sufferings increased to such a degree that sometimes he could hardly conceal them.

Charlotte could not help noticing his deepening gloom, and tried in vain to account for it. A violent scene which occurred a short time afterwards enlightened her a little with regard to her husband's state of mind. She was alone in her room, sorting her mother's letters. She had taken them out of a box in which, with several other things, was Guillaume's locket. She did not often

look at it, but that day it did so happen that she was holding it in her hand, and gazing sorrowfully on the fair hair of Raoul des Aubrys, so like his brother's that she could not see it without emotion. Her eyes filled with tears, and she was just going to replace it in the box when the Marquis came into the room. At one glance he perceived his wife's tearful countenance, the locket, which he had never seen before, the fair hair he thought he recognized, and the letters which he concluded must be Guillaume's.

As a sudden storm bursts in a sky where dark clouds have been gradually gathering, so did the pent up anguish of M. de Villiers's heart, all the sufferings he had endured for ten long years, all his love, his jealousy, and the pain which Charlotte had unconsciously inflicted upon

him, unite, concentrate, and break out in a paroxysm of fury. He seized the locket, dashed it on the ground, trod it under foot, and standing before her, pale, haggard, with a wild look in his eyes, he poured out in an incoherent manner a torrent of reproaches.

Charlotte felt ready to faint with terror. It did not make her angry, for she thought he was ill and raving. She sat motionless and silent, looking at him with unutterable surprise. By degrees his violence subsided, and a sense of shame came over him. It was the first time he had given way to this sort of violence in the presence of his wife, and he felt how terrible must be the impression it had produced. But there was no help for it, and he was leaving the room when Charlotte, who was beginning to understand the meaning of that strange

scene, said in a gentle faltering voice, "Stop a minute, Gaston. Just listen to me before you go away. You are mistaken about these letters—they are my mother's; and that hair is not Guillaume's, but his brother's. I should not have kept his hair."

If the Marquis had thrown aside his reserve and shown his wife all the regret he felt at that moment, it would have made up entirely for his angry words and passionate conduct; but it was not in his character to make this sort of atonement. No explanation took place between them, and it was only by a marked tenderness of manner and increased solicitude that he gave token of his sorrow for what had occurred. Charlotte was too generous not to accept this silent apology in the spirit with which it was offered, but she remained anxious,

disquieted, and sadly depressed in spirits.

The Marquis's state of mind had not undergone any real change. He did not, indeed, for a long time give way to any violent outbursts of anger, but his secret irritation continued to betray itself by a great inequality of temper and fitful caprice. Some slight circumstance or casual expression often quite inexplicably brought on these moods. Thus Louisa's words and Pierre's looks had been enough to raise a storm in his breast. "Louisa, at sixteen years of age, had cared for another person—but how different Pierre's fate was from his own! Pierre knew perfectly well, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that that first love of hers had vanished like a dream. The sweetest confidence existed between him and his betrothed. How happy they

were, and how wretched were his own feelings!" Such were the Marquis de Villiers's musings as he sat, with his face buried in his hands, in a remote part of the park. His wife the while was alone in her room, shedding tears, and thinking in a sad but resigned manner that, even besides its great afflictions, life has often hard and trying days, full of gloom and perplexity.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the days when shepherds and shepherdesses were the fashion in France, a chalet had been built in the park of Villiers in the style of those at the Grand Opera. The Marquise de Villiers had entirely remodelled this cottage, which preserved nothing of its first character except its name. It still was called "le chalet," and was about to become the abode of a newly-married couple. It was Charlotte's wedding-present to her adopted sister. The Marquis would fain have done far more for Pierre Severin and his bride, but both of them positively declined to accept anything more, and

wished to remain in the modest position in life which Pierre had always held. The Marquise was, therefore, obliged to content herself with improving and ornamenting with all her taste and ability her darling Louisa's little house; and on the day of the marriage, in the bright sunshine, and filled with flowers within and without, it looked indeed like the home of love and happiness. But that bright morning brought with it a parting too. When the ceremony was over, and Pierre and his wife had taken possession of their pretty chalet, the Marquis and his wife got into the travelling carriage which was to take them to Paris. Their absence from Villiers lasted two years, and at one time it seemed likely that it would have proved still longer, for some of the most important positions at court were offered to the acceptance of the Marquis de Vil-

liers, and Charlotte had her share in this flattering distinction. Her birth, her beauty, and her charming winning manners pointed her out as admirably fitted for a post of this sort; but M. de Villiers declined all such proposals. Nothing would have been more contrary to his wife's taste than that sort of brilliant slavery, and, fortunately for her, what the Marquis had refused at the outset was not pressed upon him again.

The fact is, that he was an ardent, devoted Royalist, but a very indifferent courtier. His old spirit of opposition had revived since his friends were in power. A faithful adherent in the days of adversity, he might easily have proved a troublesome friend in prosperity; and at a moment when it was essential to conciliate rather than to exasperate and irritate parties which had rather been

dispersed than vanquished, the Marquis de Villiers was not likely to make a very judicious and safe partisan. It was not long before this was perceived, and the offers once made to him, and declined, were not renewed. Absolutely as he had rejected them, he was somewhat offended that no opportunity was given him of repeating his refusal, and he began to talk rather bitterly of the ingratitude of princes. Charlotte managed to prevent this grievance from growing into a standing cause of irritation ; but she took advantage of it to urge their soon leaving Paris. She wanted Louisa's assistance in the education of her little son, and she thought that Pierre would give her good advice on the subject, as well as perhaps use his influence with her husband, whose conduct on that point often gave her uneasiness. The amusements of the

world, which she was enjoying, or rather enduring, for the first time, far from giving her pleasure, had, on the contrary, strangely reawakened impressions connected with her early sorrows. She had never been at any balls or parties with Guillaume des Aubrys. The concert, which had so greatly influenced her subsequent fate, was the only scene of public amusement where they had met. It is difficult, therefore, to assign a reason for the peculiarity which made her feel, in a brightly lighted room, in the midst of smartly dressed people, with gay music and the buzz of admiration which followed her wherever she went sounding in her ears, a sickening heart-ache, an unaccountable depression, that she did not experience by her own fireside, or when sitting by her child's bed. The image of the lover of her youth

seemed to haunt her amidst those festive scenes in a way it never did anywhere else. It would have been a relief to tell her husband of this suffering, but the remembrance of the day when she had for the first and only time mentioned Guillaume's name in his presence, made her fear to allude to the past, and she endured in silence the painful impression which haunted her, and which at times had almost the character of a mental delusion.

She happened to go one night with her husband to a great ball at one of the embassies. She was dressed in white, with no other ornaments than diamonds on her breast and in her hair, and looked so beautiful in that simple, though costly dress, that when she came in and walked across the room, every eye was turned upon her. "What a very handsome

person!" exclaimed a man, still in the prime of life, seated on a sofa by the side of a fat elderly gentleman, who had bowed to Charlotte as she passed by him. "Who is she, La Mothe?"

"Why, you don't mean that you do not know who she is?" exclaimed his friend. "Are you sure you do not remember her?"

The other, who was following Charlotte with his eyes as she was making her way into the ball-room, answered with a smile—"I should not have entirely forgotten that face, I think, if I had ever seen it before. No; I am sure I do not know her. Who is she?"

If my readers have any remembrance of the character of the person to whom this question was addressed, they will not be surprised at the delighted eagerness with which he proceeded to give in-

formation calculated to produce effect. "Well, my dear fellow," he said, "that handsome lady is no other than the Marquise de Villiers, the charming and beautiful Charlotte de Nébriant."

"Good God! Is that she?" exclaimed the other. "Is that really Charlotte de Nébriant? Ah, poor dear Guillaume!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, it is her very self; but having got over her grief, she is a happy wife and mother. To be sure, this rather spoils the romance; but do not take it too much to heart. After all, it is better than if she had thrown herself headlong into a pond." Here M. de la Mothe stopped to take a second ice from the tray a servant was carrying by. "But I own to you that what disenchanted me most was that de Villiers of all others was the man she married."

“She ought not to have married at all,” his friend answered, with his eyes still turned towards the door through which Charlotte was still visible. “But why not the Marquis de Villiers as well as, or better than, any one else? I suppose it was a *mariage de raison*?”

“I can tell you,” rejoined M. de la Mothe. “Why, nobody knows more about that affair than I do, and, indeed, you must be quite aware of it, for I was the first person, if you remember, that you met on your return from that fatal expedition.”

“Oh yes; I remember it perfectly. But what I want to hear is ——”

“What I mean is, that as I was constantly seeing Villiers at that time, I know, of course, the whole case better than any one else, and I do think the Marquis de Villiers should have been the

last person to marry the betrothed of Guillaume des Aubrys, who was so great a friend of his that he almost swooned away when I incautiously told him of his death. I had no notion till then that they were such friends.”

“Nor did I know it,” answered the young man; “and yet Guillaume used to tell me everything. I remember when we were leaving London on horseback on our way to the coast, that I asked him if he had had time to take leave of Mademoiselle de Nébriant, whom I had never seen, but he was always talking to me about her. He answered that he had sent her a farewell message by a friend who was present at our meeting, and who knew her. That was all I ever heard on the subject. There was not much opportunity for conversation at that moment, and the catastrophe which

so soon followed drove everything else out of my mind. I loved Guillaume as if he had been my brother, and to this day, though it is twelve years ago that it happened, I cannot think of his death without feeling it as acutely as ever."

"Then let us talk of something else," La Mothe cried. "It does not do to dwell on such tragical reminiscences in a gay scene like this. But, indeed, I think the best way of bringing you back to the common-place matters of life will be to introduce you to that beautiful Marquise. It will reconcile you to the fact of her not being plunged in as deep a melancholy as you would have wished."

"I shall be very glad to make her acquaintance. But do you know her enough to introduce me?"

"Know her enough! I should think so indeed," exclaimed La Mothe, quite

affronted. "I should not think there were many people in the room more intimate with her than myself. Let me only just finish this ice, and I am at your orders." And so, in due time, when the ice had disappeared, and the difficult operation had been performed of rising from the sofa and balancing his bulky form, supported as it was by very short legs, M. de la Mothe led the way to the ball-room, followed by his friend. They looked about for Charlotte, but she had left it, and withdrawn to a boudoir, where a few other persons had also taken refuge from the noise and heat of the crowded rooms.

She was suffering intensely that evening in the way we have already described. She had never been present at a more brilliant *fête*; and her own beauty had never been more striking, or

created greater admiration. The band was playing a German waltz, the melodious cadence of which seemed to her full of the most mournful pathos. She had happened to glance at a mirror, and had caught sight of her own blooming face and dazzling ornaments. The impression she received produced a sudden feeling of heart-sickness, and she hastily withdrew into a corner of the adjacent room, where she was trying to restrain her tears and recover her composure, for by the side of her own beautiful face the pale visage of her loved one had seemed to appear, and fix its gaze upon her with a look of reproach, as if upbraiding her for forgetting the past.

While still under the influence of this sort of vision, she heard her name pronounced, and, raising her eyes, saw a man she did not know standing before

her, and M. de la Mothe by his side, who said, “Madame, will you allow me to introduce to you the Vicomte de Saulny ?”

The Vicomte de Saulny !—*his* friend ! The man whose name had never been mentioned in her hearing since the day when she was told that it was he who had conveyed back to England Guillaume’s lifeless remains. She looked at him in a kind of bewilderment. There seemed to be something almost supernatural in this apparition at that moment. A spasm at the heart, which she was subject to, came on, a mist rose before her eyes, her head began to swim, and without uttering a word, she fell back on the sofa in a swoon.

All the ladies in the boudoir rushed to her assistance, each one with her fan or smelling-bottle ; all, with one voice,

exclaiming against the heat, which of course was enough to make any one faint.

The Marquis heard in the ball-room that his wife had fainted. He hastened to her, and found Charlotte sitting up, but looking pale and nervous. As soon as she caught sight of her husband, she made a strong effort, rose, took hold of his arm, and begged him in a whisper to take her home at once. They were followed to the door by a number of persons anxiously inquiring about her. Amongst them were M. de la Mothe and M. de Saulny. When she was on the steps, and about to get into the carriage, she turned round to bow to M. de la Mothe; and then an irresistible impulse made her hold out her hand to M. de Saulny, who bent over it and kissed it with the most reverential tenderness.

He saw her as she got into the carriage and drove away. It was but an instant, and he never saw her again, but at the close of a long life he still used to speak of that scene as of something he could never forget.

When Charlotte had taken off her ball-dress and diamonds, and found herself alone with her husband, she began to tell the Marquis what she had felt before her swoon, and what had brought it on, and then went on to give him the history of all the feelings of her past life. She spoke of Guillaume as she had never done before, of the whole story of their youthful love, and how she could not forget him, though she had tried to do so. Her agitation prevented her concealing or fearing anything. She earnestly wished to leave Paris; to get back to the country, to Louisa, to soli-

tude. She urged this with a vehemence which arose partly from her desire to obtain what she wished, and partly from nervous excitement.

The effect on the Marquis of this sudden and abrupt disclosure was somewhat singular. In spite of Charlotte's emotion, in spite of the feelings she had described, and the frankness with which she had acknowledged them, her husband was more relieved than wounded. The plain truth was, after all, far less terrible than the phantoms he had conjured up for so many years. He could not doubt Charlotte's sincerity. He saw she disguised nothing from him, and now that she had spoken out, he took courage to reveal to her his own long and secret sufferings. For the first time he, too, threw away to the winds all reserve, and told Charlotte, what had never before

passed his lips, the story of which she had been the unconscious heroine. She listened with surprise, with emotion, with blushes even, as if it had not been her own husband who made this avowal of his long-standing, ardent, silent love for her when a young girl, and of the yet deeper and more passionate affection with which he had worshipped her since she had been his wife. A new light was thus thrown over those fits of gloom and abrupt changes of manner which had often made her unhappy at the time, and anxious about the future.

A week after this memorable evening they returned to Villiers, more closely united by far than when they had left it. The years which followed proved the happiest of Charlotte's existence. Not that the wife, even the adored wife, of the Marquis de Villiers, could go through

life without some amount of disquietude ; but when the misunderstandings and consequent uneasiness of the first years of her married life had passed away, many more fair and peaceful days fell to her lot, and she would scarcely have accounted as a trial her husband's faults of temper, if she had been the only one to suffer from them ; if his violence had not sometimes fallen upon the beloved and charming child who was growing up by their side.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ Oh, dear, what a beautiful kite ! ” exclaimed little Anne Severin one morning, clapping her hands for joy. “ Thank you so much, Guy ; it is the most lovely kite that ever was seen. And only look at its tail ! It takes me one, two, three, four, five, six steps to get to the end of it. Thank you so much—so much ! I could never have made such a kite as that. Nor, I think, could Jeanneton either, though she has a brother who goes to school.”

Guy was listening to all these compliments without any surprise, whilst on his knees on the grass he was giving a

finishing touch to the *chef-d'œuvre*, which he thought certainly deserved all, if not more than all, the praise his little friend had bestowed upon it. But when Jeanneton was mentioned, he made a scornful exclamation. "Jeanneton, indeed! I should like to see Jeanneton make a kite like mine. She may have a brother who goes to school, but she is only a little girl like you."

At that moment the great clock of the castle struck nine. Anne, who was walking round the kite, measuring its size by the number of her steps, stopped suddenly short, and exclaimed, with a frightened look, "Nine o'clock! Oh, dear me, Guy, it's nine o'clock—do you hear?"

Guy also seemed rather alarmed, but he said, "Bah!—there is plenty of time yet." And, leaving the kite, he ran to

get some books which he had left on the grass an hour before, when, catching sight of Anne and her kite on the lawn, he had yielded to the temptation of running to help "work at it for one minute," he said. Now the question was to make up for the time which this interesting episode had made him lose. He tried hard, but did not succeed. When the clock struck the first quarter of an hour, he looked reproachfully at the dial, as much as to say, "You are in a dreadful hurry!"

Anne understood that glance, and said, "Oh, dear! you see it is too late—and it is all my fault. You lost the time in helping me. Poor dear Guy, I am so sorry." She was kneeling by his side, and her little face was full of sorrow and self-reproach.

Guy did not make any answer. He

was trying to learn fast, which is almost an impossibility when the mind is agitated.

“Can I help you?” Anne asked.

“Hold your tongue!” he impatiently answered; but in a minute he said, “yes, now that I think of it, you may hear me this lesson.”

Anne took the book. Guy began famously; Anne breathed again. But alas! the first part of the lesson had been learned before the fatal kite had made its appearance, and it soon became evident that Guy did not know a word of the rest. Anne burst into tears. “Oh, dear, dear!—it is of no use. What is to be done? You will be punished; perhaps you will be——” She stopped short.

Guy understood what she meant. “I shall be punished—that is certain, for it is the third time this week that I have

not learnt my lesson. But don't be afraid—it won't be *that!*”

Guy was alluding to a flogging, which the Marquis, in conformity with the traditions of his youth, had once bestowed on his son; a punishment which his wife had made him promise not to repeat.

The clock struck half-past nine. The children walked towards the house; Guy going first with a desperate resolution, like a condemned criminal to the scaffold. Anne hurried after him, wiping her eyes with her white apron.

At the entrance-door of the castle they met Jeanneton, a tall stout girl of thirteen, the daughter of the gardener. “I have come to take you home to breakfast, mamselle,” she said.

“Jeanneton, do wait—do wait a minute; I can't come now.”

“You will be scolded if you don’t, mamselle. Scolded and punished too, perhaps,” she added, in order to increase the effect of her speech.

“I hope so — I hope I shall be scolded; I hope I shall be punished. Do you hear what she says, Guy? I shall be scolded and punished too.”

Guy stopped short. “No!—what for? Go away, Anne; please go away. I don’t wish you to be punished.”

“It’s the same to me: I had rather be punished.”

“But I don’t choose it. I say, Anne, go away immediately with Jeanneton.”

At that moment Thibault appeared in the hall. “Monsieur le Marquis is waiting for you, Monsieur Guy,” he said.

“Be off,” Guy whispered to Anne.

“Go home, and come back as soon as you can.”

In consequence of this twofold command, Anne made up her mind to put her hand in Jeanneton's, and to walk away with her, though she kept looking back at Guy with eyes full of tears till she saw him disappear at the top of the great staircase, with a feeling of pity and terror heightened by the uncertainty she felt as to the nature of the punishment about to be inflicted. She remembered with dread the terrible day when he had been flogged, and was not quite comforted by his assurance that that would never happen again.

In spite of Jeanneton's efforts to hurry her on, she walked on very slowly, and had hardly got half way down the avenue, when she heard a loud piercing cry. One cry—it was not repeated, but

she knew it was Guy's voice, and stood still, quite frightened and dismayed, refusing to go home, and begging to be taken back to the castle. Jeanneton was obliged, at last, almost to carry her to the chalet, where she arrived looking very pale, and crying bitterly.

When Guy had parted from Anne at the door of the hall, he had made up his mind to undergo some rather severe punishment, for it was the third time he had been in fault that week, and a notion of justice very early implanted in his youthful conscience made him feel that he deserved chastisement. He was quite prepared to submit to it with a good grace; but the first words the Marquis said to him as he came into the room, the very sound of his voice, showed he was out of temper, and all the boy's good dispositions vanished.

Guy knew by experience that under these circumstances it was quite useless to attempt to satisfy his father, much more to pacify him. Children almost always know when this is the case, and Guy was particularly quick in discovering it. He did not utter a word, and the expression of his countenance evinced neither repentance nor submission.

The lesson began, and even at the outset his memory failed, and he stopped short, as if he had not even attempted to learn his task, and with a hardened, indifferent, almost impertinent look in his face, which quite exasperated his father. The only effect of his harsh reproofs was to increase the boy's perverse mood, and he became so angry that had it not been for his promise to his wife he would certainly have given him a flogging. Unfortunately, the means of correction he

resorted to were equally ill-judged. Provoked beyond endurance by the boy's sullenness, he ordered him to hold out his right hand, and Guy, though afraid of what would follow, did so without flinching. The Marquis took up a stick, which happened to be at hand, and struck his son with it. Guy gave the loud cry Anne had heard, and fell down almost in a swoon. His father had not calculated his own strength, or the weight of the weapon he used, and, only intending to correct the child, he had severely bruised his hand.

The Marquis was alarmed, vexed, and grieved beyond measure at what he had done, but would not on any account have shown it. Madame de Villiers, frightened by her boy's scream, had rushed into the room, raised him from the ground, and with the greatest effort at self-control,

led him away. The Marquis remained motionless, in a state of gloomy irritation, and thinking himself, as was perhaps true, more to be pitied than either Guy or his mother.

CHAPTER XV.

MEANWHILE, Anne was crying her eyes out at the chalet, and would not be comforted. All she entreated was to be allowed to keep her promise to Guy, and to go back to the chateau. After about an hour's tears and prayers her father said he would take her there.

Pierre Severin was always a little anxious when the teaching or the correction of Guy was in the hands of his father. He wished, therefore, just as much as Anne to find out how things were going on. And he went up to Madame de Villiers's room to inquire about it, whilst she slipped into the

little school-room, where she knew Guy would be.

And there, indeed, she found him, with his arm in a sling, looking very gloomy, and not at all softened. He did not make any reply to the first words of sympathy which his little friend showered upon him; but when she began to reproach herself bitterly for what had happened, and to say it was all her fault, he cut her short. "No; it was not your fault, nor mine. It was his fault."

"Whose fault?" Anne asked, looking puzzled.

"*His*," Guy answered, frowning. "My father's fault. I did not know my lesson. I know I did not. But it was not because of that he punished me—that he struck me. If it had been for that, he would not have done what

he did. It was something else he did it for."

Anne was quite at a loss to understand what Guy meant, and he felt that he was not explaining it very clearly.

"Never mind," he said, "I know myself very well what I mean." And pushing back with his left hand the thick locks of his brown hair, he remained leaning on his elbow, and his eyes fixed on the chimney, with an expression which his little friend did not at all like.

"But I, too, want to know what you mean," she said. "Now, do, Guy, speak to me. You puzzle me so. You look vexed, but you don't look sorry for having been naughty."

"No; I am not sorry," he answered, shortly.

"Oh, Guy!"

“No ; I am not sorry now. I was sorry this morning ; but now I am angry with my father.”

“Oh, Guy !” Anne exclaimed again, quite shocked.

“Yes ; I am angry with him. I know I was wrong not to learn my lesson, and I meant to have said so and begged pardon ; but now, somehow, I feel as if it was not my fault, but his. I should like to be sorry as I was going to be sorry, and I am vexed at being sorry in this other way. I can’t explain it. You only bother me, Anne. Let me think as I like.”

But Anne would insist on getting at the bottom of Guy’s entangled thoughts. “Perhaps you mean,” she said, “that another sort of punishment would not have prevented your feeling sorry for your fault as this one did.”

“Yes; that is just what I mean. An imposition, or dry bread for supper, or anything of that sort, would have been something like what I deserved; but what I did get”—he glanced at his bruised hand—“looks as if I had told a lie, or beaten a small boy, or done something that was a disgrace.”

After this statement of his views of the case, Guy was satisfied that he had made the matter perfectly clear, and established the facts beyond possibility of disproof. Having thus relieved his feelings, he would have been ready enough to indulge himself with a game of dominoes. But Anne was standing by his side, looking very grave, with her elbows on the table and her chin resting on her hands. She did not take any notice of the preparations for the game which Guy was making with his left hand.

“But, Guy,” she said at last, while with her little hand she pushed away, unconsciously, the dominoes he had begun to arrange, “my own dear Guy, you ought not, for all that, to be angry with your father. That is worse, you know, than any of the things you say you have not done.”

“Come, Anne, don’t be tiresome. Play with me, and hold your tongue.”

“I don’t want to be tiresome; but I won’t play unless you say you did not really mean what you said.”

“But I can’t say so; it would not be true.”

Anne looked very thoughtful, and replied, “I wonder what we should do to get rid of thoughts we ought not to have?”

“I don’t know,” Guy answered. “We can’t help it—we think what

we think, and there's an end of it."

"Oh, no, Guy," Anne exclaimed, "I am sure that is not the case. M. le Curé told us last Sunday that we must give our hearts, our souls, and our minds to God. We must, I am sure, take bad thoughts out of our minds before we give them to Him."

"Well, only tell me how to do it. I should be glad enough to know. When I love my father, I love him so much. The day he took me out riding with him—the first day I had the pony, you know—he seemed so pleased with me, and I loved him so much. It is much pleasanter, I can tell you, than to be angry; but I can't help it—it is not my fault. I keep thinking of the way he looked at me this morning, with such fierce eyes. And when he made me hold out my hand,

if you had only seen how dreadful his face was——”

Anne's large eyes filled with tears, but she wiped them away, and then suddenly exclaimed, “I know—I know the way. Come now, Guy, will you do it? Will you do what I tell you?”

Though Guy always thought it right to maintain in Anne a proper sense of the inferiority of her sex, and to remind her frequently that she was only a little girl, he was in the habit of doing what she advised, and sometimes admitted that, though four years younger than himself, she was, generally speaking, the wiser of the two.

“Well, what have you got to say?” he asked.

Anne squatted down before him, in a half kneeling, half sitting position, and said, “Well, now, just listen to me, Guy,

darling. I dare say that that punishment was too hard a one—it was bigger than your fault; but then that does not prevent what you said just now from being very naughty. It was wrong, very wrong, I am sure of that. You say you can't help your thoughts; but M. le Curé says, 'If you think something that God forbids, try to do something quite contrary to that thought.' Don't you remember? He said so last Sunday after catechism, just as if he knew what was going to happen. Well, then, dear, dear darling Guy, just do to-day—now—something that will please your father." And running to a little table where Guy's books were lying, she brought them to him, and said, "Now, only just try and learn your lessons quick and well. You know you can when you like. I won't say a word, or make the least noise. I

will sit by you as quiet as a mouse. Just begin, and see if you don't get rid of that bad thought."

Guy at first made a horrible face when this measure was proposed to him ; but Anne would not be put off, and, by dint of coaxing, she carried her point. The two children sat side by side, and, during the next half hour, the buzzing of a fly might have been heard in the little school-room, whilst Guy really studied in good earnest, and Anne remained motionless for fear of disturbing him. At last he exclaimed, " There, now, I have got it at last, and quite well—no mistake."

Anne took the book, and Guy repeated his lesson perfectly from beginning to end. " Get up now," she said. " Can you walk ? Does it hurt your hand to walk ?"

Guy laughed and said, " No, not to

walk. But, oh ! it is very sore when I move it."

"Poor darling Guy!" Anne cried, melting again into tenderness. "Sit still, don't move."

"No nonsense," Guy answered, jumping up. "It is all right now. Go on before, knock at the door, and say I am there." The twofold effort had quite driven away his bad humour.

M. and Madame de Villiers and Pierre Severin were still talking together. They had just been agreeing that Guy should be sent to school. Charlotte had had the courage herself to propose it, and Pierre had strongly concurred in the expediency of this measure. The Marquis, strongly impressed with a feeling of regret at his violence, had given his consent to it, when a little knock at the door was heard. "Come in," Madame de Villiers said;

and Anne's little bright rosy face was seen peeping in. "Guy is here," she said, "and he wants to say his lesson."

They were all surprised. Charlotte had been still more afraid of the moral effect on Guy of what had occurred than pained at his physical suffering. Pierre had also dreaded that a long fit of obstinacy, such as he had sometimes noticed in him, would ensue. And the Marquis, though he did not feel himself called upon to acknowledge his fault with regard to his son, was nevertheless longing to see him and kiss him, and fearing that he would be too frightened to come near him. He was very much affected when he saw the little fellow come in, looking very pale, with his arm in a sling, his hair dishevelled, but with a sweet expression on his face, and coming forward, with his book in his hand, without fear or

embarrassment. There was a mist before M. de Villiers's eyes as he took the book. Guy repeated his lesson perfectly ; but before he had got to the end, his father had snatched him up in his arms, and folded him to his breast. In that instant, all remembrance of the treatment which had agitated the mind and wounded the feelings of the boy, passed entirely away. The enraptured look of little Anne's face struck Madame de Villiers. She guessed what had taken place in the school-room. " Look, Pierre," she said, " at the good angel of my poor Guy." And taking Anne in her arms, she kissed her over and over again, while M. Severin, pleased and touched by what she had said, looked fondly at his daughter, and caressed her little hand in his own.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was Charlotte who had proposed that Guy should go to school, and when she had done so, and had succeeded in obtaining her husband's consent, she thanked him as if he had granted her a favour. Nevertheless, as the time of the boy's departure approached, it seemed as if each week as it elapsed was shortening her existence by a year. Her eyes kept following him about with a restless anxiety. After she had kept him some time by her side, she would suddenly tell him to go away. "I must get used," she would say, "not to see you, my Guy." At other moments she would

take his head between her hands, and gaze on his face as if afraid that she would forget his features; or if she heard his voice she ran into her room to hide herself and cry without being noticed, unless by Louisa, who suffered and wept with her.

In the midst of all this agitation came the blessed, calm, happy day of the two children's first communion. It had been settled that it should take place a week before Guy's departure. That day, most deeply interesting in all Catholic households, at the Chateau de Villiers proved also an eventful one.

Early in the morning Charlotte was standing by her son's bedside while he slept, gazing on his face with a feeling more tender and more solemn than usual. Her boy had been to confession the evening before, and the peace which absolu-

tion gives seemed to rest on his brow, and to give to his sleeping face an angelic look which matched with the childlike beauty of his complexion and the delicate form of his features. A painter would have chosen that face as the image, not indeed of a seraph in adoration, but of one of those divine messengers sent to minister among men, resembling them, and yet bearing marks of a supernatural strength and purity.

Thus Guy looked at that moment; but while his mother was praying by his side, a slight frown disturbed his brow, and changed the expression of his face. A cloud had come over the spirit of his dream, but it soon made way for a smile when he awoke and saw his mother bending over him. But she could not help praying in that hour that God's hand might ever be near him to drive

away all dark shadows, and bring back the light of heaven.

And now the ceremony was almost over. The Abbé Gabriel stood at the altar, and said a few words to the children kneeling before him in silent prayer. Everything within and without was calm and peaceful. The sun's rays, shining through the painted glass windows, clothed Anne's white dress with rainbow hues, and cast a glory on Guy's head. All was calm and bright around them; all suited well that holy and serene moment, when the soul for the first time receives the source of all joy, virtue, and strength. As he ended his discourse, the Abbé said, "May every grace, my dear children, dwell for ever in your hearts. Be strong and patient—strong against temptation, patient in suffering. May you, my dear boy, ever

confess and defend your faith, without cowardice or fear ; but may you, above all, be brave in the fight against yourself. And you, my dear child, may you also have courage. Never forget the promises of this day, the pledge you have received, and the pledges you have given. And may peace, and strength, and grace, rest on you and dwell with you for ever." These words were simple enough, but they were uttered with so much feeling that they sank into the hearts of those to whom they were spoken.

From the moment her son received Holy Communion, Charlotte seemed relieved from the painful depression she had been suffering from for some days. A new and strange happiness filled her soul. She seemed to hear a voice whispering to her that all the sorrows and separations of earth were at an end for

her, and that nothing remained but union and happiness, perfect peace and entire security. She was the last to rise from her knees, and came out from the church calm and consoled. After Mass, she presided at breakfast at the castle, conversing with her friends in a cheerful, gentle manner. She also gave Anne a bracelet with a medallion surrounded by pearls, and containing a lock of her beautiful fair hair, prematurely mixed with a few silvery threads.

In the afternoon, Charlotte again went to church, and in the evening took her usual place at the dinner-table, where, in honour of that solemn day, all were assembled ; but immediately afterwards, being seized with a pain at the heart, which had become so habitual that she hardly ever mentioned it, she withdrew to her own room and went to bed.

When, at nine o'clock, Guy wished her good-night, she as usual blessed him fervently. And Anne also she blessed that evening, when with her mother she came to say good-bye to her before returning to the chalet.

Madame de Villiers slept for some time. At about midnight she awoke, and saw her husband sitting by her bedside, and looking at her with anxious tenderness. Something in her sleep had alarmed him ; he could hardly tell why. There did not seem any tangible cause for uneasiness, only her hand, which he held in his, seemed to burn like a hot coal. "Do you feel ill ?" he asked.

"Oh, no ; not at all ill," she answered.

Her husband said nothing, and kissed her hand. She gently pressed his in return. "Oh, Gaston," she murmured, "what a blessed day ! I am so happy."

After uttering these words, Charlotte fell asleep again, and never woke in this world. The communion she had made that morning by the side of her boy, then for the first time receiving his God, had been her viaticum, and the promise of happiness which a heavenly voice had whispered to her soul was now fully and for ever accomplished.

Before daybreak a physician summoned in haste arrived only in time to attest that life was extinct, and that no human remedies could have saved the Marquise de Villiers, who had died, he stated, of an affection of the heart; a long-standing one apparently, and such as is often caused by a violent shock or terrible emotion in early youth.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE shall not describe or dwell on the first days of a grief which was to know neither consolation nor end, or attempt to speak of the mournful sadness which fell on the Chateau de Villiers and its whole neighbourhood. Wherever the name of the Marquise was known, it was held in veneration, and her death was considered as a public calamity. Everything about the castle itself became dark and cheerless, like the character of the unhappy man who owned it, and the melancholy aspect of his house was in sad keeping with the heavy gloom which had settled on his soul. Great and deep,

likewise, was the grief of the inhabitants of the chalet; but theirs was a peaceful sorrow, which did not exclude contentment and quiet of mind.

Pierre Severin took Guy to Paris; and during the years he was at college, it was not at the chateau, but at the chalet that he spent his holidays. The Marquis's temper was not improved by affliction, and his solitary habits of life made him more than ever unfit to be his son's tutor and companion. The fate of the poor boy would have been melancholy indeed, if Pierre Severin and his wife had not lavished upon him the tenderest affection and care. In the one he found a friend, who could at any rate guide and direct, if not control and subdue, his impetuous disposition; and in the other, the affection of a mother. At the same time, he could not help

feeling surprise, and a sort of resentment, at what he supposed to be his father's indifference. Each time he returned to Villiers, it was with the hope that his society would give some little pleasure to the Marquis, and each time he was wounded and grieved at finding how little, at least apparently, this proved to be the case. When he arrived, indeed, he was received with open arms, and a welcome which seemed to promise better things—but this was all.

It would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, that a father's heart should not warm towards such a son, or his pride not be gratified by the sight of the handsome, high-spirited youth, who each time he came back to his home was improved in looks and in mind. But after the first moment of pleasure, the dark melancholy of the Marquis returned,

and Guy's likeness to his mother seemed only to increase it. This resemblance was not one of those that strike indifferent observers. It was not, if we may use the expression, a permanent one ; but now and then Charlotte's own glance was seen, by those who loved her, beaming beneath the eyelids and dark lashes of her boy. Her smile suddenly threw a well-known brightness over his rather stern and serious countenance, and there were accents in his voice which rang on the ear with a strangely familiar sound. But these reminiscences only heightened the gloom, instead of touching the heart of the Marquis, and had often the effect of making him even more than usually irritable. Then Guy often lost his temper too, and spoke disrespectfully to his father. No sooner had the impatient

words passed his lips, and a stormy scene taken place, than, full of sorrow and regret, he made his way to the chalet, and received Pierre's remonstrances, his (so-called) Aunt Louisa's advice, and last, not least, his dear little friend Anne's lectures, in the best possible spirit.

Thus passed for the young de Villiers the years of his college life. At the moment when the Revolution of 1830 broke out, he was in his twentieth year, and completing at Paris his preparatory studies for the Polytechnic school. If his home had been a happier one, perhaps, as an only son and the heir of a great name and a large fortune, he would not have cared so much to make the army his profession; but he was too old to put up with the monotony and solitude of the Chateau de Villiers, and too

young, as his father at least thought, to set up a separate establishment. There was then nothing for it, so he thought, but to pursue with ardour and perseverance the studies which would open to him an independent career. At the same time, he availed himself frequently enough of the liberty which was allowed to him by the tutor with whom he was reading, and who had the good sense to see that Guy would be far less inclined to misuse it when freely conceded, than if he had been tempted to obtain it by stealth. This sort of life was, on the whole, very agreeable to him, and it was with a feeling of annoyance, though not of surprise, that he received a letter from his father, desiring him to leave Paris at once and return to Villiers, and intimating at the same time that he was to give up all idea of the profession he had intended to follow.

Guy was by no means inclined to sympathise with the Revolution, or to admire the overthrow of the ancient dynasty, which represented, in his opinion, not only the monarchy, but the country itself. But the Marquis's letter roused the spirit of independence and opposition which he had inherited from him, and though he acquiesced in his decision, and announced that he was preparing to leave Paris, he added that before taking leave of companions he liked, and with whom he had hoped one day to serve his country, he wished to spend a few days with them, and, above all, not to part sooner than he could help from one young man, who was his own most intimate friend.

For several reasons this letter displeased the Marquis. Political passions are not generally dulled by age, and his

had been roused by the new revolution with greater violence than ever. For the first time since his affliction, he shook off his apathy, and with as much fire and impetuosity, and even less restraint than in his youth, he threw himself into the contest with impassioned animosity. Forty years before, a political difference of opinion had estranged him from his brother, and now he erroneously thought that he detected in what Guy said a tendency to a similar spirit of opposition. He was also annoyed at the allusion to his son's friend, with which the letter closed. And, indeed, it would not have been made had Guy been in a good humour when he wrote, for he very well knew that his intimacy with a young man of quite a different position in society from his own had always more or less displeased his father. But, as we

have already said, to submit at all was a difficult effort to one of his character, even though the concession required was not inconsistent with his own principles and opinions. There had been, in consequence, a little irritation in the tone of his letter, and this had excited more than a little amount of temper in the Marquis's mind, which evinced itself by the ungracious reception he gave his son on his arrival at his melancholy home.

Dinner passed in gloomy silence. Guy felt sad. In spite of the circumstances which often disturbed his intercourse with his father, he loved and respected him ; and at that very moment what most depressed him was to notice the evident effects of recent trials on his furrowed brow and whitened hair. He looked at him with a sorrowful sympathy, but as no responsive glance met

his own, and the Marquis's countenance remained as stern and cold as possible, he began to turn his pity on himself. He certainly at that moment thought his fate a very hard one. The great dining-room, in which he and his father were sitting alone opposite to each other, looked gloomy enough. Villiers, which he had once been so fond of, assumed, now that he was ordered back to it, the semblance of a place of banishment. It seemed a sort of prison to a youth of twenty, and not one word was said either implying any prospect of leaving it, or softening by kindness his recent disappointment. It was not very unnatural that he should feel depressed. There were, however, two bright points in the horizon of Villiers. One was the chalet and its inhabitants; the other was the friend above-mentioned, who was at that

instant much nearer than the Marquis had the least idea of. At the very time that Guy was about to take leave of young Franz Frank, the latter had been invited by his aunt, who had a small property not far from the Chateau de Villiers, to spend with her the month of September, and the two friends had, therefore, enjoyed the pleasure of travelling together, and had parted only at the little town of M——, where Guy had found his father's carriage, and Franz a car which his aunt had sent for him.

Guy had been in no hurry to inform his father of this circumstance, especially after the ungracious manner in which he had been received. Not but that he fully intended soon to announce his friend's arrival in the neighbourhood, and mention the invitation he had given Franz

to visit him at the chateau; but before he broached that delicate subject it was desirable, he thought, that the cloud which now darkened his father's brow should have somewhat subsided. The matter was, however, brought to a speedier issue by the Marquis suddenly exclaiming—"And your friend, Monsieur Frank? You have seen the last of him, I hope? That wretched *émeute* will have had at any rate one good result, for I suppose he has disappeared in the storm, or is sailing in a direction so opposite to yours that all intercourse between you must of course be at an end?"

Guy became crimson, but he tried to look calm and answered—"No, indeed, you are mistaken. Franz Frank is a Royalist." (The word Legitimist had not yet been invented.)

“A Royalist!” the Marquis exclaimed.

Guy had perhaps gone a little too far in his assertion. His friend’s political opinions were not quite as decided as his answer implied. “I mean,” he added, “that his family is Royalist.”

“His family!” the Marquis again repeated in a sneering tone.

“His only remaining relative I should have said. Madame Lamigny, the aunt who brought him up, and who lives at the Pré Saint Clair.”

The Marquis made no answer, and Guy, seizing the opportunity, boldly added—“Franz is there now. We travelled from Paris together.”

This intelligence was particularly displeasing to the Marquis. From what he had heard of the family of young Frank, he felt strongly prejudiced against

him, and, on what he considered just grounds, extremely opposed to his friendship with his son. He had hoped that circumstances had broken off their intimacy, and now, on the contrary, he found that Guy, separated for the present from all his other companions, would be thrown by an unlucky chance more than ever into his company. He could not even think of a good reason for desiring him not to frequent the Pré Saint Clair, for it did so happen that Madame Lamigny was well known to be a most ardent Royalist, a circumstance which at that moment did not at all tend to soften his feelings towards her and her nephew. He felt tempted to say, "What business has she to be of my way of thinking?" and almost resented it as an additional offence. At last he said, in a discontented tone, "How does

Madame Lamigny happen to be M. Frank's aunt?"

"I think his mother was her sister."

"What! was Madame Lamigny a Jewess?"

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, no," the Marquis impatiently re-echoed. "But then her sister was, or some other members of her family."

"Well, perhaps some of them may have been so," Guy answered, with a smile. "Franz's family was originally Jewish, but his father became a Christian when he married. I do not know how our neighbour of the Pré Saint Clair came to marry his mother's sister."

"I can satisfy you on that point," the Marquis replied, "even though I do not pretend to be conversant with Madame Lamigny's family history, and did not know, till you informed me of it,

that she was the sister-in-law of the Jewish usurer who was converted, it seems, by his fair wife, the mother of your *friend*. But what I happen to know is, that Lamigny, an insignificant poor sort of *gentilhomme*, whose only merit was his loyalty, met his wife in Germany when he was already tolerably old. She was singing, I believe, at some great musical festival, and finding that she would not admit of any attentions—I must do her that justice—which had not marriage in view, he offered her his hand.”

“I have heard that she is an excellent and most respectable woman,” Guy exclaimed, anxious to throw credit on his friend’s not particularly distinguished relative.

“However excellent and respectable she may be,” the Marquis impatiently rejoined, “you are perfectly aware, I

hope, that I do not intend to allow of any visiting intercourse with the Pré Saint Clair. I have never been there, and I must request that you also will abstain from placing yourself on a footing of intimacy with these people. In short, I wish you not to call upon them or invite any of them here."

As he said this, the Marquis rose from the table and walked into a little drawing-room, where he usually spent the evening since he had lived alone in that large house. Guy lingered a little behind, trying hard to subdue the irritation which was beginning to gain possession of him. The wisest plan, he thought, would be to go out a little, and as the windows of the dining-room, like all those on that side of the house, opened on the terrace, he went out into the air and walked up and down. But

he did not find that this tended to tranquillize his spirits. On the contrary, every word his father had uttered kept recurring to his mind as a most glaring injustice. "Was it not enough," he mentally exclaimed, "to be suddenly cut off from all the interests, pursuits, and pleasures natural to his time of life—must he also be deprived of so innocent an enjoyment as the society of a friend, against whom, without even knowing him, his father had conceived so bitter, unfounded, and unjust a prejudice!"

It was with an indignant swelling of heart that Guy mused on the noble qualities, the intellect, and the genius of the friend from whom his father was bent on separating him. He paced backwards and forwards on the terrace in the quiet moonlight, repeating over

and over again the words "absurd" and "unjust," his excitement increasing every moment rather than subsiding. At last he thought he would go and see Pierre Severin, to whom he could at any rate speak without restraint, and he went into the drawing-room to fetch his hat.

"Where are you going?" inquired his father.

"To the chalet," Guy replied. "I have not seen Pierre Severin yet, and I want to speak to him."

"He is not at home," the Marquis answered. "He has been gone a week, and does not come back till to-morrow. Since he has been away Madame Severin and Anne generally pay me a visit in the evening. I suppose they will be here in a few minutes."

Guy threw down his hat, and, with his hands in his pockets, a frown on his

face, and a swelling heart, sat down in silence. His father looked at him and said, "There you are, in a towering passion! Upon my word, it is too ridiculous. Your temper, my dear boy, is becoming quite unbearable."

"I am not in a passion," Guy replied, in a trembling voice; "but I own I am quite in despair."

"In despair! Oh, indeed! What next, I wonder!" the Marquis exclaimed, in a sneering tone.

"My dear father, for heaven's sake don't speak to me in that manner." Guy meant to use words of entreaty, but in spite of himself they sounded imperious.

"Do you presume to dictate to me," the Marquis answered, in a stern manner, "when and how I am to speak?"

"I do not dictate anything," Guy replied. "I am ready to hear what-

ever you have to say, and to listen to it with respect. I wish I could obey your commands; but I really cannot. You insist on my giving up Franz's friendship, and leaving off seeing him; and for my part, all I can say is—that I will not do so."

"You will not do so!" the Marquis said, with an accent which only increased his son's anger. It was one of those moments when the likeness in their characters produced a fatal collision, which, like the crossing of two drawn swords, inflicted wounds on both sides.

"I am sorry to disobey you," Guy exclaimed; "but nothing shall induce me to give up a friend I esteem and love. I will not wound and insult his feelings. And it is just on account of those very circumstances which prejudice you so unjustly against him, that I will not break off our intimacy—just

because his birth is not noble, and his position uncertain—just because he is poor, I will, in spite of everything, remain Franz's friend."

The Marquis's anger was increasing every moment, but he maintained an outward composure which exasperated Guy. "'This is all very fine !'" he said ; "very generous, and, to a certain extent, very fair. I am quite ready to admit M. Frank's claims on your friendship, as far as regards his unfortunate position, and will give you at once a proof that on that subject we agree." As he said this, M. de Villiers took from the drawer of his writing-table a purse containing some thirty gold pieces, and as he handed it to his son, he added—"Here, take this sum, and do whatever you like with it for your friend, and remember that you can apply to me at any time for money for him."

The purse fell at Guy's feet. It is scarcely possible to describe the fit of rage which sent the blood to his head, and made his heart throb with wild agitation. Quite beside himself with anger, he seized the purse, and was just in the act of hurling it back to his father, with a violence he little estimated, and which might have had fearful consequences, when he felt that somebody was laying hold of his arm; and turning round, he saw it was Anne Severin, who had come in through the terrace window, and arrived just in time to see and understand the meaning of this scene. But Guy's passion was too violent to be subdued in an instant. He roughly seized with his other hand the arm of the young girl, and pushed it violently away. She staggered and nearly fell down, and then he at once recollected himself.

Not so much because she gave a little scream, nor because his father started up alarmed, as because he saw lying on the ground the fragments of the bracelet which the Marquise de Villiers had given to Anne on the day of her death, and which he had always looked upon as something sacred. Anne always wore that precious token of his mother's affection, and now he had crushed and broken it upon her arm! And while the pieces were lying on the floor, and the fair hair exposed to view, Anne's blood was flowing fast from the cut which a fragment of the broken glass had inflicted on her arm!

He fell down at her feet—he implored her forgiveness—he tried to take her hand, and to examine the wound; but Anne hastily covered it with her handkerchief, and, bending over him, she said in a hurried, anxious manner, “Not

my forgiveness, Guy—not mine. Your father's—your father's."

The young man remained a moment on his knees, his face buried in his hands, struggling silently with himself, and perhaps lifting up his heart in prayer. Then rising, he picked up the purse and laid it gently at his father's side, and in a faltering but respectful voice, with a strong effort, said, "My dear father, pray forgive my burst of passion. Franz does not want money, and would not accept any from me. But I am sorry for the manner in which I received what you offered. I will atone for my violence by complying with your wishes."

This scene had, however, a different result from that which Guy in the sincerity of his repentance had made up his mind to accept. The sight of the broken bracelet had produced as great

an effect on the father as on the son, though for a different reason, and in a less evident manner. It had painfully reminded M. de Villiers of the day when, twenty years before, he had himself broken Guillaume des Aubrys's locket in a fit of passion, which had well nigh scared from the heart of his idolized wife the affection she was beginning to feel for him, and this bitter recollection inclined him in this instance to judge himself severely and his son with leniency.

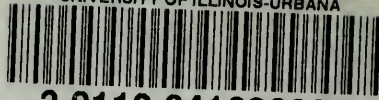
To his great surprise, Guy received from his father on the following day a spontaneous permission to bring Madame Lamigny's nephew to Villiers, and he was delighted to see that, although the cast of his features betrayed his Jewish origin, and his rare talents showed him to be an artist, the greatest part of M. de Villiers's prejudice vanished when he

became personally acquainted with Franz Frank, whose modest and gentleman-like manners did not at all correspond with the idea he had formed of his son's college friend.

Anne suffered a good deal from the wound in her arm, and even after it was healed the scar remained. Guy's sorrow and repentance were so great that he thought the lesson he had received would never be forgotten ; but this was not the case. His resolutions did not take entire effect until, two years later, a still more remarkable event made a lasting impression upon him, and opened a new era in life.

END OF FIRST VOLUME.

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